PROTECT YOUR EYESIGHT P. 52 | **SAVE BIG ON A NEW CAR** | LOWER YOUR MEDICAL BILLS P. 64

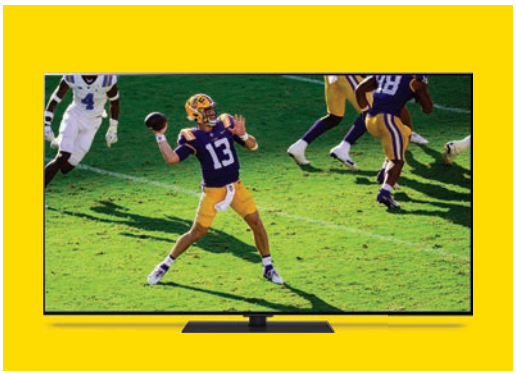
CR Consumer Reports®

NOVEMBER + DECEMBER 2024

574 PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

Top Picks OF THE YEAR



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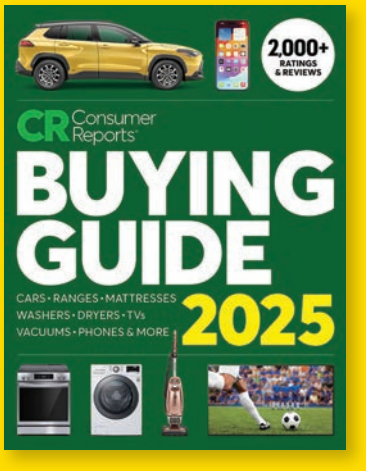

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Buy More Safely Online

THE INTERNET has revolutionized our purchasing practices. Virtually every one of the Top Picks in this month's cover story (on page 28) can be bought online. Even products we once shopped for in person—like home appliances and used cars—are now commonly purchased online. So much for "kicking the tires!"

The ease of online shopping is, I confess, enjoyable. But it can also obscure serious concerns when it comes to platforms like Facebook Marketplace and OfferUp, where people sell items to one another. These services can be great for finding deals, but they can also expose us to safety risks, such as buying recalled products, or giving personal info to scammers who want to take your money.

CR experts have suggestions for keeping you and your money safe when using these online marketplaces.

First, avoid buying child car seats, bike helmets, and other products where safety is of paramount importance. And make sure the item you're buying hasn't been recalled by searching for it at Recalls.gov

We also advise that you not share any personal info—your home address, credit card number, or email address—with the seller. And be sure to communicate through the site's messaging feature.

When you meet to collect your purchase, choose a well-lit, heavily trafficked public location—never your home. Meeting in front of a police station is a good choice, and some towns designate "safe zones" just for this purpose.

Finally, avoid paying in cash. Instead, after inspecting the product, use an app such as Apple Cash or CashApp—but be aware it may offer limited fraud protection. Send a small test payment or scan the seller's in-app QR code to ensure you're sending money to the right person.

Online bargain hunting is great. CR is here with the advice you need to reduce the risks.

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Uncovering Risky Products

For years, CR has been pushing online retailers to take more responsibility for the safety of products sold on their platforms by third parties. In July, the Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a unanimous and precedent-setting ruling that Amazon must do just that.

The case involved some 400,000 products, including faulty carbon monoxide detectors, flammable children's pajama sets, and hazardous hair dryers, that the CPSC said "pose a risk of serious injury or death to consumers." The agency argued that the way Amazon notified and refunded customers was not thorough enough, putting consumers at risk.

Amazon didn't dispute that the products were dangerous, but maintained that it didn't have to handle recalls the way the CPSC prescribed because it was not legally a "distributor" of goods but merely an intermediary—like a delivery service—between the third-party sellers and buyers. The CPSC said that claim misrepresented the extent of Amazon's control over every step of the retail process and ruled against the company.

Amazon plans to appeal the decision. But if it stands, the ruling will require the company to submit a proposal to the CPSC for how it will notify the public about hazardous products they've purchased and incentivize them to remove them from their homes. It will also make clear that Amazon and other online retailers can be held responsible for the safety of products sold on their platforms by third parties. Go to Recalls.gov to find out whether a product has been recalled.

400,000

The number of hazardous products—from carbon monoxide detectors to hair dryers—that Amazon must now alert customers about.

SOURCE: CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

ACTION UPDATE

Two recent reports, one by The New York Times and another by congressional investigators, showed that several automakers were using in-car technology to collect data (including location intel) on car owners. In some cases the information was secretly shared with data brokers and ended up in the hands of insurers. In August, CR delivered a petition, signed by nearly 30,000 people, urging the Federal Trade Commission to investigate further and ensure carmakers stop these invasive practices, which can cause drivers to pay more for insurance or be denied coverage altogether.

Cleaning Up Tainted Food

WHAT'S AT STAKE

American consumers unknowingly buy a lot of tainted chicken. A 2022 CR investigation found about a third of ground chicken samples were contaminated with salmonella, nearly all of it strains posing significant health risks. And current federal standards actually allow the sale of raw poultry even if salmonella is detected. So it's not surprising that an estimated 125,000 people are sickened each year by salmonella in chicken, and 43,000 by contaminated turkey.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

For years, CR has been pushing the Department of Agriculture to classify salmonella as an adulterant in raw poultry, much as it does dangerous strains of E. coli in ground beef. And after our 2022 investigation of ground chicken, we again called for stronger regulations.

These efforts are now paying off. In July, the USDA proposed a first-of-its-kind framework under which poultry contaminated with certain strains above certain levels would be barred from the market and subject to recall. It would also require poultry producers to monitor contamination throughout the processing system. This is important because the filthy and crowded conditions in which most chickens are raised means that salmonella can easily spread from one bird to another.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

After a comment period, the USDA will review and analyze feedback on the proposal before finalizing it. In the meantime, go to **CR.org/salmonellaregs** to learn more and for tips on how to stay safe from salmonella when preparing food at home.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

7 ANTI-AGING SUPPLEMENTS TO
GREAT DEALS ON USED CARS
CR Consumer Reports
7 ANTI-AGING SUPPLEMENTS TO TRY
These can protect your heart, strengthen bones, help you sleep, ease joint pain, and more
Plus 3 to avoid

Our September 2024 cover story, **"7 Anti-Aging Supplements to Try,"** examined the best choices for improving your sleep, protecting heart health, and more. CR readers shared their thoughts about that story and other September articles. Read our responses here.

YOUR SEPTEMBER cover story has a section about the interactions between prescription drugs and supplements that identifies vitamin K as a blood thinner. It's not. In fact, it's the opposite: Vitamin K helps blood clot properly. While it's correct to say that vitamin K should be avoided if you're taking blood thinners, it's because the vitamin can make warfarin and similar medications less effective.
– Leslie Grabowski, Sarasota, FL

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

EDITOR'S NOTE *You are correct! You should avoid vitamin K supplements if you're on those types of meds. But you can still eat foods rich in that nutrient, such as asparagus, broccoli, and greens. The most important thing is to keep the amount of those foods relatively steady in your diet so that the medication's effect on blood clotting remains stable.*

WHEN MY JOINTS began to get creaky in my 30s, I started taking glucosamine and chondroitin, and found it helped. I tested this a few times by taking a break [and then finding that] the aches returned. I take them daily now, 50 years later, and while I clearly have some arthritis, I do not have arthritic pain. I'm obviously a sample of one, but I suggest you do not dismiss the potential efficacy blithely.
–Ann Somer, Brookline, NH

EDITOR'S NOTE *We're glad you find those supplements helpful. There's little evidence that they pose big risks. Still, despite your anecdotal success, the scientific research on them is mixed at best, and the pills can cost $10 a month or more. That's why JoAnn Manson, MD, chief of preventive medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, recommends that most people stick with more proven activities like tai chi and swimming, and losing weight (if you're overweight), to ease arthritis.*

THE ARTICLE on supplements recommended fish oil, as previous CR articles have. But there are recent medical studies that cite an increased risk of atrial fibrillation from taking fish oil supplements. As AFib is quite common, can be asymptomatic, and significantly raises the risk of a stroke, fish oil [recommendations] should be made with appropriate warnings of that risk.
–Fred Orlando, Portsmouth, NH

EDITOR'S NOTE *A recent analysis did link fish oil with an increased risk of atrial fibrillation in the general population. But the same study, published in BMJ, found that it reduced cardiovascular risk for people with a history of heart attack, stroke, or other forms of cardiovascular disease. That's one reason the experts we consulted recommend it, especially for people with a history of heart disease.*

PILLOW TALK

I READ "The Best Pillows From Our Tests" and was surprised that bamboo pillows were not included. After sleeping on one while visiting friends, I came home and ordered one. I love the coolness!
–Carol Bloemke, Lombard, IL

EDITOR'S NOTE *While we don't currently have pillows in the ratings with bamboo filling, we did test one that has a cover made with bamboo. The StyleWell (Home Depot) Cooling Memory Foam with Removable Bamboo Cover Pillow, $30, is CR Recommended with an impressive Overall Score of 81.*

It did well in our tests of how insulating a pillow is, trapping less warmth than other models. That's important for many shoppers, so all of our pillow ratings indicate whether a product is claimed to contain any cooling materials (gel foams, for example). We also test "breathability" to determine how well the material allows for moisture to dissipate.

I REPLACED OUR PILLOWS four years ago and I am still trying to find a way to recycle the old ones. No nonprofit or thrift store will take them, and I'm agonizing over sending them to a landfill.
–Nancy Lindsay, Camarillo, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *According to Earth911, an organization that helps connect consumers with recycling centers and sustainable products, down pillows are not accepted at recycling centers "whole." But you can compost the feathers, separating the fabric for recycling if it's clean. For pillows made of other materials, wash them according to the manufacturer's instructions before recycling. You can get a list of local recycling centers at search.earth911.com by entering "textiles" and your ZIP code in the search boxes.*

DISHWASHER HOSE OPTIONS

IN "THESE ARE the Appliances That Last," you recommended certain dishwashers for reliability. You didn't mention whether any of them have rodent-resistant tubing under the machine. My last dishwasher died, in part, due to rodents chewing through the tubing. The damage was not covered by my home warranty. I was told that some models come with metal tubing that can prevent the problem.
–Marlene Hancock, Springfield, OR

EDITOR'S NOTE *That's true: Some dishwashers come with a metal water line. If you're buying a new model, ask the manufacturer or retailer about that feature. If it doesn't have it, you (or your installer) can replace the plastic using a metal hose kit that you purchase separately. One example, the Everbilt 6 ft. Dishwasher Installation Kit, $32, available at retailers including Amazon, Home Depot, and Lowe's, has different adapter sizes so it can work with any brand.*

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH PROBIOTICS?

In "7 Anti-Aging Supplements to Try," you advised skipping probiotics. But in "CR's New Guide to Yogurt," you noted that the most important component in yogurt is probiotics.
—David W. Luce, Los Angeles

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's better to get probiotics from food. The health perks of these "good" bacteria are due in part to their interaction with the foods they ferment. As the bacteria chemically alter the food—that is, turn milk into yogurt—they secrete enzymes, organic acids, and proteins that may offer benefits.*

USED-CAR DECISIONS

IN "GET A GREAT DEAL on a Pre-Owned Car," you gave the example of a 2021 Camry. Its stated used price was 15 percent less than the new-car price. But a 3-year-old car might have 36,000 miles on it. That's 15 percent of 240,000 miles, meaning the car would have to last beyond that point before the cost per mile was less than buying new. Are used cars really a better deal?
– Robert Filkins, Ballston Lake, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE *Used cars aren't always the better deal in the long term. Every situation is different, from your budget to the local availability of cars. The key is to go into the car-buying process armed with the latest facts, figures, and strategies to ensure you get a fair deal. With the Toyota Camry example, that $28,800 price for a car with proven reliability, great fuel economy, abundant safety features, and added space and comfort may make it a smarter choice than a new, more basic small sedan–a Corolla, for instance.*

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E. Total free or nominal rate distribution (sum of 15D1, 15D2, 15D3, and 15D4): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 4,129; no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date, 4,168.
F. Total distribution (sum of 15C and 15E): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 2,612,013; no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date, 2,497,565.
G. Copies not distributed: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 149,295; no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date, 225,471.
H. Total (sum of 15F and 15G): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 2,761,308; no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date, 2,723,036.
I. Percent paid (15C divided by 15F times 100): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 99.84%; no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date, 99.83%. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete: Beth Ifcher, Senior Marketing Director, Sept. 4, 2024.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Dutch Ovens

WE TESTED: 12 models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly water in a pot comes to a boil, how evenly it simmers tomato sauce and cooks other types of food, how easy it is to clean, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 44-92

BEST OVERALL
Our Place Perfect Pot
$110

92 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT VALUE
Spice by Tia Mowry Savory Saffron Enameled Cast Iron
$55

87 OVERALL SCORE

DISHWASHER-SAFE
Lodge Essential Enamel Cast Iron
$65

77 OVERALL SCORE

Space Heaters

WE TESTED: 100 models
WE TEST FOR: How effective a model is at keeping a room and a nearby person warm; how quiet, easy to use, and safe it is; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 58
Range: 23-82

INTUITIVE CONTROLS
Lasko T22840
$50

75 OVERALL SCORE

SUPER-QUIET
Honeywell ThermaWave 6 HCE870W
$65

71 OVERALL SCORE

HEATS LARGER ROOMS WELL
Woozoo 302929
$75

68 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

My bedroom is chilly. Is it okay to leave our space heater on overnight?

NO. IT'S NEVER SAFE to leave a space heater on while you sleep—even if the model you own has a tip-over switch, which should automatically turn the heater off if it falls over while in use. Space heaters are responsible for 1,700 house fires a year in the U.S., on average. Our experts say it's better to use yours to warm up your room while you're awake, and then turn it off just before you go to bed. Having a warm, breathable comforter on your bed (go to **CR.org/bestduvets** for our favorites) is an effective—and safer—way to fend off that chill. Another tip: If you have a ceiling fan, set it to spin clockwise at a low speed. This helps push warm air from the ceiling down into the room.

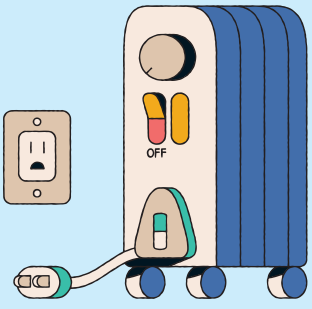


ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Stand Mixers

WE TESTED: 38 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model can mix a large batch of cookie dough, how quickly it can make whipped cream, the number of easy-to-use features, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 74
Range: 39-83

SUPERIOR MIXING & WHIPPING
Wolf Gourmet WGSM100S
$800

83 OVERALL SCORE

EASIEST TO USE
KitchenAid Bowl Lift KSM70
$600

79 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
Frigidaire ESTM020
$90

77 OVERALL SCORE

Mirrorless Cameras

WE TESTED: 48 models
WE TEST FOR: Image quality, both when using a flash and without one; video quality; how easy it is to focus; battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 83
Range: 71-92

A TOP CHOICE WITH GREAT BATTERY LIFE
Fujifilm X-H2 w/16-80 mm
$2,300

88 OVERALL SCORE

EXCELLENT VIDEO QUALITY
Nikon Z6 II w/24-70 mm
$2,200

86 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE & LIGHT WEIGHT
Canon Eos M50 Mark II w/15-45 mm
$770

81 OVERALL SCORE

Upright Vacuums

WE TESTED: 49 models
WE TEST FOR: The amount of embedded debris it lifts from a medium-pile carpet, the amount of sand it picks up from bare floors, how easy it is to push, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 42-78

BEST BAGLESS
Shark Navigator Professional NV360
$200

78 OVERALL SCORE

BEST BAGGED
Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150
$300

77 OVERALL SCORE

EASY-TO-HANDLE BAGLESS
Bissell Pet Hair Eraser Turbo Lift-Off 3774F
$280

61 OVERALL SCORE

Snow Blowers

WE TESTED: 87 models
WE TEST FOR: The time it takes a model to remove snow, how easy it is to push and turn, how far it throws the snow from the plowed path, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 69
Range: 30-92

TWO-STAGE GAS BLOWER
Toro 38842
$2,400

92 OVERALL SCORE

TWO-STAGE BATTERY BLOWER
Ego SNT2807
$2,200

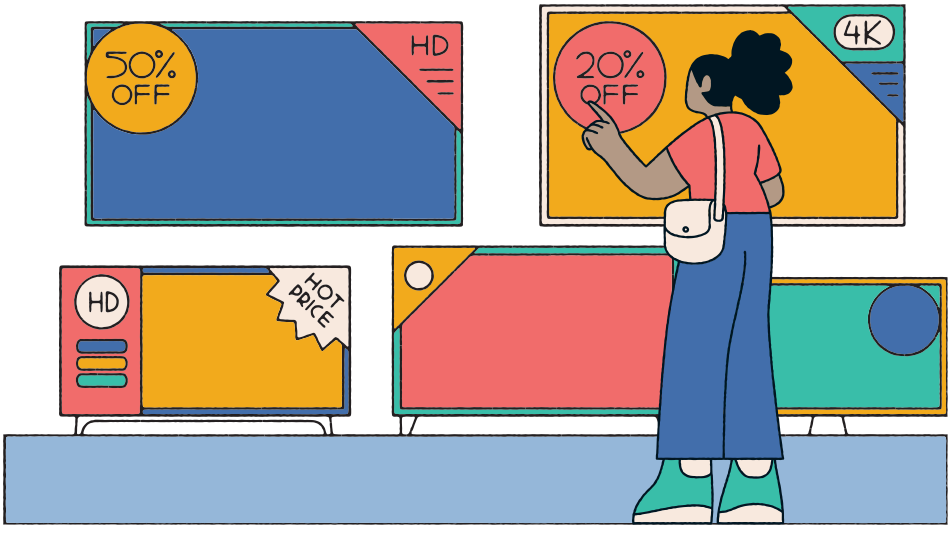
88 OVERALL SCORE

SINGLE-STAGE BATTERY BLOWER (FOR LIGHTER SNOW)
DeWalt DCSNP2142Y2
$1,000

70 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Microwaves & More



Is Black Friday a good time to get a deal on a new TV?

IT IS. In fact, last year's Black Friday sales included some of the biggest discounts on televisions we've seen in recent years. (On average, they were an estimated 22 percent off.) So if you're hoping to get a new TV at a discount, this is the time to shop.

One way to get a good deal is to consider derivative models. These are TVs that are similar to models introduced in the same year but have slightly different model numbers. They're often exclusive to a single retailer—such as Best Buy, Costco, or Walmart—and can be made specifically for Black Friday sales. They might offer fewer features than those standard models, but you won't be sacrificing much: We're talking about fewer HDMI inputs or maybe a simpler remote control. We don't test all of the derivative models, but we bring a few into our lab each year. In the past, we've found that some of them from major brands perform well in our tests and can cost about $100 to $150 less than the standard models.

One thing to remember when shopping for TVs on Black Friday: Some doorbuster specials are models with older technology or they're from lesser-known brands—so they may not be a great deal. It's best to look for discounts on recent models from large, reliable brands like LG, Samsung, and Sony. As Black Friday nears, go to **CR.org/deals**, where our experts will be tracking and reporting on the best deals out there on TVs (and many other products).

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

How can I be sure a charity I'm thinking of donating to is reputable?

CHARITIES DIFFER WIDELY in how they operate and allocate the funds they raise. Some invest the majority of money donated directly into their programs, while others spend a hefty portion on administrative and fundraising costs. And a few are total scams, not donating any money to the cause specified.

How to choose wisely? If you have a specific charity in mind, check its standing with one or more of the major charity watchdogs, including the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, and CharityWatch.

The BBB Wise Giving Alliance offers accreditation to charities that meet a long list of criteria, including strong conflict-of-interest policies and a requirement that they spend at least 65 percent of donations on their charitable programs. CharityWatch uses a letter-grade rating system that considers the percentage of overhead spent on programs, the cost of fundraising, and other measures of efficiency.

You can also use these sites to find causes worthy of support. If you want to donate to our troops, for example, the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund—which spends 94 percent of contributions on its programs—received an A+ from CharityWatch and the top score of 100 on Charity Navigator.

Before you donate, always be sure the name exactly matches the group you're interested in. Many charities have similar names, which could lead you to give to the wrong one or even donate to a scammer who has set up a fake organization with a copycat name. Keep a record of all your contributions for tax purposes.

Can my windshield washer fluid freeze in the winter?

IT CAN, unless you use a premixed product that's specified as an all-season or a winter formula, like Prestone All Season or Rain-X De-Icer. Nonwinterized windshield washer fluids, including some concentrated formulas that you mix yourself, may freeze when the temperature is below 32° F.

In any event, if your windshield washer fluid isn't spraying on demand, don't keep pressing for it, says Alex Knizek, a CR car tester. The pump can break from operating without fluid in it or if it's clogged with ice. Stop at the nearest gas station to clean your windshield manually. Once you reach your destination, parking in the sun or in a garage may help thaw the frozen washer solution back into a sprayable fluid.

If you want to keep using your bottle of nonwinterized fluid, adding isopropyl alcohol can help keep it from freezing. Check the washer fluid's label for how much to add.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

CR Insights

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

IN THE KNOW

Great Gifts Under $40

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD. PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

Soundcore by Anker P25i True Wireless In-Ear Headphones $25

These wireless Bluetooth buds deliver good sound and stay charged for 10 hours. And the carrying case multitasks: It can recharge the buds on the go for 20 additional hours and can be attached to a key chain.

Dash Express Tasti-Crisp Air Fryer $30 (Sam's Club)

One of the quietest air fryers our experts have tested, this 2.6-quart model is also easy to clean and small enough to fit on most kitchen countertops. The handle at the very top of the fryer allows you to stow it quickly and easily.

The Chocolate Room Signature 6-Piece Truffle Box $24

This little gift box will dazzle your recipient with rainbow-hued, dome-shaped chocolates. Our taste testers say the flavorful filling options—including hazelnut and passion fruit—make each truffle a joy to eat.

Espro P0 Ultralight Travel Coffee Press $39.95

For the coffee lover on your gift list: This versatile French press actually brews a tasty cup on the go. Its filter keeps coffee grounds contained while you sip. You can also pop out the filter and the coffee press becomes an insulated thermos.

**Ends Dec. 6, 2024. Offer is not stackable with other codes or offers.*

Great Gifts Under $40

Continued

Crate & Barrel French Kitchen Marble Butter Keeper $35

Sturdy, sleek, and polished, this marble butter crock from Crate & Barrel keeps butter cool and looks great on any countertop. While the crock should be hand-washed, there are no nooks and crannies to make cleaning difficult.

Sumpri Color Coded Extending S'more Sticks $15

These marshmallow-toasting sticks are both practical and fun to look at. They extend to almost 3 feet, so you won't get too hot from the campfire, and they come in six colors, so you can keep track of your own stick. They retract for easy storage.

Natalie van der Meer
Deputy Editor

I OWN THIS!

"This compact label maker has helped me organize my pantry, closets, and more. And it's a breeze to use. I just type in the smartphone app and hit print, and the label is ready to use in 10 seconds. My favorite part? Because it's a thermal printer, it never runs out of ink!"

Phomemo D30 Portable BT Home Label Maker $20

Chi Handheld Garment Steamer $38

Perfect for packing in your carry-on luggage, this small clothing steamer can be filled with tap water and heats up in just 40 seconds. It offers 8 minutes of steaming and has a manual steam button. In our tests, it smoothed out a rumpled dress shirt quickly.

Guittard Grand Cacao Drinking Chocolate $10

The top pick in a CR staff taste test, this 53 percent cacao drinking chocolate delivers a rich, flavorful cup that isn't overly sweet. For the best results, our tasters say to whisk 3 tablespoons of the powder into 1 cup of milk and heat on your stovetop.

Magicteam Sound Machines White Noise Machine $15

Small enough to easily fit on your nightstand, this plug-and-play machine will help send you off to sleep. It offers 20 different soothing sounds, including the patter of rain, ocean waves, and the crackle of a bonfire.

C Crest 20-pc Glass Food Storage Set $39.99

This colorful set of 10 lidded glass containers aced our test for keeping food fresh, and is super-durable and dishwasher-friendly. Our evaluators also like that the tops snap easily onto the bases.

91
OVERALL SCORE

PORTRAITS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (SUMPRI); MANUFACTURERS (REMAINING)

83
OVERALL SCORE

Anker Nano Power Bank $26

Never have your phone die on you again. This tiny portable charger can power up two devices at the same time, with lights that show the charger's battery status. The built-in USB-C male connector, shown above, folds down to fit in a purse or pocket.

91
OVERALL SCORE

Amazon Basics MJ-BH5001W2 Blender $39

Handheld blenders, which are small enough to be stowed in a drawer, are a smart addition to any small kitchen. This one outperformed models in our tests that cost three times as much. It received excellent scores for blending and puréeing foods.

Cuisinart Wooden Handle Tool Set $35

This kit is the perfect companion to a portable grill when you're at a campsite or tailgate. It has all the essentials, including a spatula, tongs, and skewers, and it comes in a lightweight case, which makes it easy to transport.

84
OVERALL SCORE

Hamilton Beach 22910 2-Slice Toaster $25

Hamilton Beach's small stainless steel model toasts bread quickly and evenly. It's also easy to clean, fits bagels, and has a higher score in our ratings than some other toasters we've tested that cost five times as much. It comes with a one-year warranty.

Repour Wine Saver Bottle Stoppers $10 for a 4-pack

These stoppers absorb the oxygen trapped inside of opened wine bottles to keep the contents from turning to vinegar. Each stopper claims to keep a bottle tasting fresh for up to two months—helpful for when you pour a glass or two and want to save the rest.

JisuLife Portable Neck Fan $32

Here's a gadget that looks like a pair of headphones but is actually a fan that can help keep you cool. The JisuLife is quiet compared with other models we tried, and although you wear it around your neck, our testers say it feels light enough to be comfortable.

Dash Fresh Pop Popcorn Maker $22

This 16-cup popcorn popper delivers light, toasty popcorn. Even when we made a batch without seasoning, the slight caramelization of the popcorn's flavor was excellent. Plus, our staffers like that it has a small butter-melting tray on top.

Paul Hope
Deputy Editor, Home

I OWN THIS!

"These handy cutting mats are thin, light, and easy to clean. I like to use them to chop parsley, cilantro, and garlic because when I'm done, I can fold the board slightly to transfer food right into a dish or pan. I also love that this set includes logos on each board–a cow, a chicken, a fish, and a tomato–to help you avoid cross-contamination."

Carrollar Flexible Plastic Cutting Board Mats $9 for a set of 4

TECH UPDATE

How to Save More Money When Shopping Online

You probably use an online search engine like Google to get news, look up word definitions, and answer medical questions. But search engines can also help you save money. Here are three important ways they can do that.

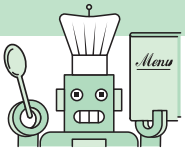
Earn Rewards for Your Searches

If you use Bing, you'll earn 5 points for every search you make after your first two searches. (You can also earn extra points by taking a daily quiz, answering a poll question, and doing other tasks.) Then you can redeem your points for e-gift cards at stores like CVS, Starbucks, Target, and more. For example, 5,250 points can get you a $5 Amazon gift card. You can also use your points to donate to charities like Make-A-Wish International.

Other search engines, like Ecosia and GiveWater, also turn your searches into money for good causes by donating a portion of their revenue or profit to charitable projects.

Use a Photo to Find What You Want Faster

Shopping for something—say, a dress or a winter coat—that you saw in a photo and want to know where you can buy it? Google Images' reverse image search and Bing Visual Search let users search the web using images rather than text—and they can help you save money when shopping. For example, let's say you see a leather chair you like, but it's pricey. Snap a photo and upload or paste it into the search bar. The search engine will find other retailers where that chair may be sold (so you can compare prices), as well as similar-looking chairs that you might be interested in.



Plan Meals Efficiently

According to the Department of Agriculture, American families toss about 31 percent of their food, costing households around $1,500 per year. Search engines now have built-in AI chatbots that can create meal plans based on your preferences, and what foods you have in the fridge—and recipes that reuse ingredients can reduce food waste and lower your grocery bill. For example, you can type into the search bar: "I need 5 days of dinner recipes. I have chicken breasts, spinach, eggs, potatoes, tomatoes, garlic, and quinoa. We avoid gluten." You'll get a detailed meal plan with recipes in seconds.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMANTI. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (WINE, FOOTBALL); CONSUMER REPORTS (1)

CR Time Traveler TOP PICKS

1938 In our coffee taste tests, a lesser-known brand, Ben Hur, bests popular brands such as Folgers and Maxwell House.

1947 We test 12 refrigerators and praise one made by Admiral for having a "special super-cooling compartment" (now known as a freezer).

1951 This Hamilton Beach "tank" vacuum cleaner is the best of 21 tested models. It even beats out a popular high-quality Electrolux vacuum.

1966 In a test of 10 new instant-load cameras, this top-rated Minolta 24 Rapid camera is the only model to offer multiple shutter speeds.

1979 CR's taste testers sample 1,500 pancakes in search of the perfect batter mix. Our hands-down winner is Jiffy Baking Mix.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

HOW TO CLEAN PRACTICALLY ANYTHING™

CR's Stain Removal Guide—Holiday Edition

Don't let red wine on your carpet or candle wax on your tablecloth mess with your festive cheer. Use our recommended cleaning solutions below (trying them first on an inconspicuous spot). And always use a blotting motion when treating stains on carpets, napkins, clothing, and the like, because scrubbing can damage the material.

WINE

For white wine, launder washable items as soon as possible. If the stain is on a carpet, blot it with water. Mix 1 teaspoon of a mild clear dish soap (without bleach) into 1 cup of warm water. Dab the solution on the stain, then blot again with plain water. For red wine stains, follow the same instructions above, then dab the stain with 3 percent-strength hydrogen peroxide to help remove the darker stain.

GRAVY

Use a spoon to scrape away excess gravy. Pretreat the spot with a top stain remover like OxiClean MaxForce (at right) for 15 minutes; launder as usual in cold water. Repeat if needed. For carpet, dab on a small amount of mild dish soap. Then use a clean rag to keep blotting until none of the stain transfers to it. To finish, blot with water. Still there? Sprinkle on baking soda; vacuum once it has absorbed.

CANDLE WAX

Scrape off any excess wax. For fabric—especially delicate items that can't be machine-washed—sandwich the stained area between two paper towels. Apply an iron set on medium. As you pass the iron over the top paper towel, the paper will absorb the wax. Repeat with a clean towel until it's all lifted. If wax dripped on your candlestick holder, place it in your freezer. Once the wax is frozen, it's easier to scrape off.

TREE SAP

To help dissolve the sticky sap from a pine, fir, or spruce tree on items like a tree skirt, blot the spot with isopropyl rubbing alcohol. Then pour a top-rated detergent directly onto the stain and let it sit for 5 minutes. If the item is washable, you can then launder it as usual, using hot water if the item's care label allows it. For tree sap on carpeting or upholstery, dab the spot with isopropyl alcohol (testing a small spot first). Dry with a clean cloth.

LAUNDRY STAIN REMOVER

OxiClean MaxForce Spray
$4.50

86 OVERALL SCORE

1982 New-car sales are down in 1982, but fuel-efficient small cars, like this redesigned Toyota Celica, still sell well.

1994 We test the latest "wizardry" in tech: the portable CD player. Of four popular models, this Sony player impresses us with its superior headphones and lower price.

2012 This little Ninja blender doubles as a food chopper, is easy to use, and aces our tests for making smoothies and puréeing soups.

2017 For the first time, SUVs outsell sedans in the U.S. The 2016 Toyota RAV4 Hybrid is a CR favorite because it's the most fuel-efficient non-plug-in SUV we tested, at 31 mpg overall.

Roku 65R8B5/ 65R8BX
$1,200

74 OVERALL SCORE

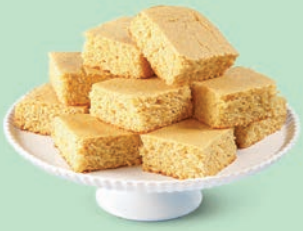
2024 In our annual Top Picks roundup, our experts pick the top-rated products of the year. Among the winners: this 65-inch Roku TV, for its quality picture at a great price.

To discover the very best products we've tested in 2024, turn to our "Top Picks" article on page 28.

FOOD IQ™

Which Holiday Treat Is Healthier?

Many nutrition experts say it's important to enjoy holiday foods rather than trying to skip them. And the truth is, some of our favorites may not actually be so bad–and can even be kind of good–for us. There are holiday treats that not only are lower in calories and fats but also may offer a nutrient boost. Below, we take a closer look at some of the popular foods you're likely to encounter this season–and we reveal which options offer the best benefits.



DINNER ROLL OR CORNBREAD

Dinner rolls made with white flour lack whole grains, which help you feel full—and are about 150 calories each. Cornbread has a similar calorie count per piece, but the cornmeal in it offers whole grains, which gives it the edge.

Healthier pick
CORNBREAD

PUMPKIN PIE OR APPLE PIE

Apple pie often has a top crust, but pumpkin pie has only a bottom one—which can save you about 100 calories per slice. Eating less of that pie crust also means you'll be getting less saturated fat from butter.

Healthier pick
PUMPKIN PIE

CHAMPAGNE OR EGGNOG

Champagne contains about 125 calories per 5-ounce glass, making it much lower in calories than a cup of eggnog (which is about 225 calories). Eggnog is also higher in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sugar.

Healthier pick
CHAMPAGNE

AUTO UPDATE

Protect Your Car This Winter

HEAD TO THE CAR WASH ONCE A MONTH

To combat rust and the other ill-effects of road salt and brine on your vehicle, CR's experts advise a monthly car wash during snow season—or more if you drive daily. Many car washes offer a monthly subscription for unlimited washes or a loyalty program with a free wash after several paid ones.

WASH THE UNDERCARRIAGE

This car wash option is a smart investment if you regularly drive on salted or muddy roads, both of which can increase rust development under your car.

SPRING FOR WHEEL CLEANING

Most of the year, we think targeted wheel cleaning isn't necessary, but in the winter, it's worth the extra dollars. That's because spraying wheels can help clear road salt away from your brakes, where it can cause damage. Skip tire shine add-ons though, which are mostly for aesthetics rather than protection. Tires have built-in antioxidants and waxes to protect them.

CLEAN OFF THE LIGHTS AND SENSORS

Road salt and other grime can cover lights and backup cameras, and hinder important safety sensors, like those for automatic emergency braking. After it snows, clear off the white stuff and ice, then use a towel to wipe down mirrors, lights, and sensors (usually in the front fenders, bumpers, grille, and windshield). Some cars have a dashboard alert to let you know when a sensor is blocked.

ICON: RODRIGO DAMANTI. PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK (DINNER ROLLS, CORNBREAD); GETTY IMAGES (4)

EXTEND A FLASHLIGHT'S BATTERY LIFE

Flashlight batteries can drain even when the light is off. If your flashlight sits unused in a closet or go-bag most of the time, take the batteries out and store them nearby.

SAVVY SHOPPER

Powerful Flashlights

Your smartphone already has a built-in light, so why do you need a dedicated flashlight? "If there's a power outage or a weather emergency, it's much better to have a flashlight as your primary source of light," says CR tester José Amézquita. What's more, using the flashlight function on your phone can drain the battery quickly–and you'll want to reserve the power on your phone for communication and information. The brightness of all the flashlights we tested was significantly higher than that of an iPhone 14 Pro, which was the newest model available at the time we tested.

To find a flashlight that you can depend on, we tested 10 models of varying sizes from popular brands, evaluating their brightness level, battery life, and durability. We dropped them from 3.28 feet onto a concrete floor. We also evaluated how comfortable the flashlights were to hold. At right are the models we liked best.

For more info on our testing, go to CR.org/bestflashlights.

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD. PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

1 LONG-LASTING & BEST FOR GENERAL USE

Energizer Vision HD 6AA Performance Metal Light With Digital Focus $22

WEIGHT 14.8 oz.

POWER 6 AA batteries (included)

This Energizer model provided a wider beam of light than any other model we tested—with an angle of 160 degrees. That extra-wide coverage makes it especially good for outdoor spaces, so you can see both in front of you and to the sides. Its battery's staying power is remarkable: It lasted well over 24 hours and is comfortable to hold.

2 BRIGHTEST & EASY TO RECHARGE

Husky 5000 Lumens Dual Power LED Rechargeable Focusing Flashlight $60

WEIGHT 1 lb., 10.2 oz.

POWER 9 AA batteries (not included) or USB-C charging (cable included)

This model is ideal for illuminating objects that are far away. It's superbright and is also adjustable: With a twist, you can change from a narrow spot beam to a wider flood beam. Plus, it uses either alkaline batteries or USB-C charging. It can even charge other devices (like a phone). One caveat: Its powerful beam lasted only between 2 and 5.25 hours in our tests.

3 COMPACT FOR A NICE PRICE

GearLight S1000 LED Tactical Flashlight $13

WEIGHT 5.5 oz.

POWER 3 AAA batteries or one 3.7-volt lithium-ion rechargeable battery (not included)

This light is the least expensive of those we tested, but it lasted over 24 hours. Its brightness, beam distance, and coverage are all good, especially for its small size. It's also lightweight, making it a smart choice for a go-bag. It can switch between a spotlight and a flood beam, and also has an SOS mode, which repeats a pattern of three short, three long, and three short flashes (signaling "SOS" in Morse code).

4 EXCELLENT FOR CLOSE-UP INSPECTION

Braun 140 Lumens Rechargeable LED Pen Light $18

WEIGHT 1.6 oz.

POWER Micro USB charging

Light, small, and nice to hold, this pen light is a great choice when you want to precisely direct a light beam in an enclosed space. The battery lasted 5.73 hours in our tests, which is long for a flashlight of this size: Other pen lights we tested lasted between 1.8 and 4.5 hours. It also has a removable metal clip so that you can secure it to a pocket or bag.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Power Snow Shovels

Clearing your walk and driveway after a snowstorm is a tough chore, but the prices of snow blowers (often more than $1,000) can make you hesitate to buy one—especially if you don't have that much territory to clear. Enter the power snow shovel. This is a battery-powered or corded shovel that can clear a path with less strain than regular shoveling, and for a fraction of the cost of a full-sized snow blower. How it works: When you push the shovel along the ground, an auger clears up to 6 inches of snow, throwing it 10 to 30 feet away. Our Recommended models here did a good job clearing snow in our tests. But these shovels can be heavy (some weigh about 15 pounds), so when you lift one, remember to use your legs instead of your back. Once your path is clear, put down salt or sand, or both, to help it stay that way.

92 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Greenworks 2600602**
12 inches wide
$350

5/5	REMOVAL SPEED
5/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
4/5	THROWING DISTANCE

87 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Greenworks 2600702**
12 inches wide
$300

4/5	REMOVAL SPEED
5/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
3/5	THROWING DISTANCE

85 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Ego MSS1203**
12 inches wide
$400

3/5	REMOVAL SPEED
5/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
4/5	THROWING DISTANCE

82 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Kobalt (Lowe's) KMSS 1040A-03**
12 inches wide
$220

3/5	REMOVAL SPEED
5/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
3/5	THROWING DISTANCE

77 OVERALL SCORE

Skil PSS1200C-10
12 inches wide
$280

3/5	REMOVAL SPEED
5/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
3/5	THROWING DISTANCE

71 OVERALL SCORE

Toro 39909
11 inches wide
$300

3/5	REMOVAL SPEED
3/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
5/5	THROWING DISTANCE

52 OVERALL SCORE

Toro Power Shovel 38361
12 inches wide
$150

2/5	REMOVAL SPEED
1/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
4/5	THROWING DISTANCE

46 OVERALL SCORE

Snow Joe 24V-SS13
13 inches wide
$200

1/5	REMOVAL SPEED
1/5	PLOW PILE REMOVAL
2/5	THROWING DISTANCE

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

FORD & LINCOLN SUVs & TRUCKS

Ford is recalling 90,736 SUVs and trucks to replace engines that may suddenly fail. The vehicles include the 2021-2022 Ford Bronco, F-150, Edge, and Explorer, and Lincoln Aviator and Nautilus. Only vehicles equipped with a 2.7-liter or 3.0-liter EcoBoost engine are subject to the recall. A manufacturing defect could cause the intake valves to break while the vehicle is in motion, which could cause a sudden loss of power and lead to a crash. Ford says that prior to an engine failure, drivers may notice the engine is running rough and a check-engine light is illuminated on the vehicle's dashboard.
What to do: Dealers will inspect each vehicle, perform a test on the engine if necessary, and replace any faulty engines. Owners may contact Ford at 866-436-7332. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 24V635. Ford's number for the recall is 24S55.

SAMSUNG RANGES

Samsung is recalling 1,120,905 slide-in electric ranges because the front-mounted knobs on the ranges can be activated too easily by accidental contact, posing a fire hazard. The ranges were sold at Best Buy, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, and other appliance stores nationwide, and online at samsung.com. Depending on the model, the ranges were sold from May 2013 through August 2024 for $1,250 to $3,050.
What to do: Call 833-775-0120 or go to samsung.com/us/support/range-knob-kit for details and to receive a free set of knob locks or covers compatible with your model. If you use the range without knob locks or covers, keep children and pets away, check the knobs to ensure they are turned off before leaving home or going to bed, and do not leave objects on the range when it is not in use. For WiFi-enabled ranges, you can also activate the "Cooktop On" alert on the Samsung SmartThings phone app.

AMBIANO COFFEE MAKERS

Aldi is recalling about 28,000 Ambiano Single Serve coffee makers because they can expel hot water from the top of the machine, posing a burn hazard. The coffee makers were sold at Aldi grocery stores in 38 states and the District of Columbia from July 2023 through September 2023 for about $50.
What to do: Stop using the coffee maker and return it to an Aldi store for a full cash refund of $49.99, plus applicable sales tax. Alternatively, you may receive a $75 Aldi electronic gift card when you go to recallrtr.com/aldicoffeemaker, register the recalled coffee maker, and receive instructions on how to cut the unplugged cord, dispose of the product, and upload photos showing the model number, registration number, and cut cord.

AVOCADO MATTRESS PADS

Avocado Mattress is recalling about 55,480 Avocado Organic Cotton mattress pad protectors because the pads violate the mandatory federal flammability regulation for mattress pads, posing a fire hazard. The pads were sold in Avocado stores nationwide and online at avocadogreenmattress.com from January 2019 through March 2024 for $200 to $370.
What to do: Stop using the mattress pad. Call 844-326-5009 or go to avocadogreenmattress.com for details and to obtain a free replacement pad. You should cut the old mattress pad in two, and write the date and your initials on the attached law label. Then upload photos of the cut mattress pad and law label to avocadogreenmattress.com/pages/recall.

DEWALT BATTERY MOWERS

Stanley Black & Decker is recalling about 46,200 DeWalt Battery Push and DeWalt Battery Self-Propelled walk-behind mowers because if water gets into the mower's handle, the mower can fail to shut off when the bail handle is released or it can start without a key, posing a laceration hazard. The mowers were sold at Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Tractor Supply, and other stores nationwide, and online at acehardware.com, homedepot.com, and tractorsupply.com from January 2024 through July 2024 for $530 to $750.
What to do: Stop using the mower if it has gotten wet. Call 800-990-6421 or go to dewalt.com for details and to get a free repair at an authorized service center.

NOVEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

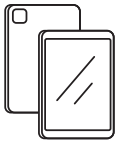
COFFEE MAKERS

HUMIDIFIERS

DECEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

EXERCISE MACHINES

TABLETS



ICONS: RODRIGO DAMANTI. PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (FORD); CPSC (DEWALT)

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Best Laptops—for Less

How to get the features you want at a price you'll love.

by Nicholas De Leon

APPLE MACBOOK AIR
$1,100
79 OVERALL SCORE

SAMSUNG GALAXY BOOK4
$900
76 OVERALL SCORE

LENOVO IDEAPAD SLIM 3i 15
$480
67 OVERALL SCORE

If **YOU'VE SHOPPED FOR A NEW LAPTOP LATELY,** you may have been put off by the sheer number of options, from simple $300 devices to $3,000 models equipped with the latest, most sophisticated computer chips and other hardware. But the truth is, you can get a terrific laptop, one with all the power, storage, and portability you need, for as little as $500 to $600.

How? By focusing on a few key factors. These include the laptop's size and weight, some technical specs that will match what you want to do with your computer, and a handful of optional features that you might really enjoy.

Here's how to get exactly what you want. We'll also show you some great laptops at really good prices, and tell you when and where to look for the best deals. (News flash: The holiday season is an ideal time to shop!)

The Right Size for Most People

Laptop screens (measured diagonally) span anywhere from 10 to 18 inches, but we think that a 15-inch model is the sweet spot for most people. At that size, you get a workspace big enough to comfortably display the text on a web page or the cells in a spreadsheet. And the computer itself will be plenty portable—light and small enough to tuck in a bag and cart to the local library or take out to your backyard.

A 13-inch laptop will be a bit lighter, but the keyboard may feel cramped. And while you may love a 17-inch screen for watching videos, you won't enjoy lugging the laptop around the house, much less to the airport, the neighborhood coffee shop, or the waiting room at your auto repair shop.

As the ratings chart on page 26 shows, you'll find lots of reasonably priced 15- to 16-inch models on store shelves, whether you prefer Apple, Dell, Lenovo, or another laptop brand. And that means you'll have plenty of luck finding one that genuinely fits your needs.

WHAT'S THE PERFECT FIT FOR YOU?

EASY TO CARRY, BUT THE KEYBOARD CAN BE CRAMPED.

STILL EASY TO CARRY, BUT BETTER TO TYPE ON.

OFFERS A BIG, BEAUTIFUL SCREEN, BUT NOT SO PORTABLE.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH. PHOTOS (SCREENS): GETTY IMAGES (3); ICONS: GUILHERME HENRIQUE

Chips, Memory, and Storage Made Easy

Today's most powerful laptops feature sophisticated processors, lots of memory and storage, and separate graphics cards meant for people who want to play complicated video games without a hiccup. But if you rarely have to venture beyond Google Chrome, Microsoft Office, and Zoom calls, you don't need anything fancier than this: a midrange processor, 8 gigabytes of memory, and 256GB of solid state storage.

PICK A MIDLEVEL PROCESSOR

The processor in your laptop determines how much muscle there is under the hood. For routine use, you can get away with an entry-level processor. If you're buying a Windows laptop, that means an Intel Core i3 or AMD Ryzen 3—but to avoid slowdowns, we recommend the Intel Core i5 or AMD Ryzen 5. You don't need to upgrade to a level 7 processor or anything higher unless you do stuff like edit high-resolution video or compete against serious gamers.

If you're more of a MacBook person, you should know that Apple has shifted from Intel processors to its own M-series processors, and they perform very well in our labs. You can choose a laptop that uses

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD

the new M3 processor or one with the earlier M2 or M1 version. (See "To Save More, Buy an Older Laptop," on the facing page.) Most people won't notice a difference between the three processors.

CHOOSE AT LEAST 8GB OF MEMORY

For the average person, 8GB of memory works just fine. It's worth noting, though, that we're seeing an uptick in modestly priced laptops with 16GB these days, and if you find one at a price you like, it's worth buying. The extra memory will help streamline performance, particularly for anyone who tends to keep lots of applications and browser tabs open.

DON'T OVERSPEND ON STORAGE

This is where your laptop keeps files and applications: software, photos, videos, and the manuscript for your great American novel. Few people need more than 256 gigabytes of storage on a laptop. That's because photos and home movies have been migrating to our phones and cloud storage, while our music and movies are often streamed from Spotify and Netflix.

If you have an extensive library of family videos or music files to store on your laptop, you can upgrade to 512GB. Just note that this can increase the price of the model by $200 or more.

Another option is to transfer files to an external hard drive. A 1 terabyte drive, available at Amazon or Best Buy for less than $75, is all you need. (It's useful for keeping a backup copy, too.) When you want to access them, you simply connect the device to your laptop with a cable, and everything you need will appear in a folder on the screen.

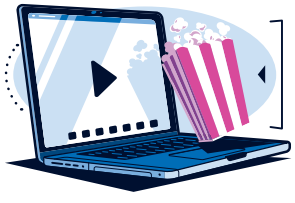
SKIP A SEPARATE GRAPHICS CARD

If you're a diehard gamer or a video editor, you might consider getting a laptop with a dedicated graphics card. This will give it a little extra horsepower for working with big image files. Otherwise, you can skip it. It won't improve your everyday experience.

Now, on to the fun stuff! What else do you want your next laptop to have?

4 Laptop Features to Consider

You can, of course, pocket the money you save with the tips we've shared, but here are a few upgrades that will make your laptop more fun to use.



OLED DISPLAY

If you love to stream video using your laptop, you might want one with an OLED display, known for producing deeper blacks and striking contrast ratios on many high-end TVs. These screens are usually found on mid- to high-end laptops—Apple uses OLEDs for its MacBooks, for example.

2-IN-1

If you'd like a laptop that doubles as a tablet, consider a 2-in-1 convertible model. It lets you bend the keyboard behind the display via a 360-degree hinge. You can even use the keyboard like a kickstand for the display, propping up the laptop in tent mode. This is a great way to screen photos and videos for friends.

TOUCHSCREEN

A laptop equipped with a touchscreen allows you to scroll through web pages and photo rolls using your finger. Add a stylus and you can create sketches and make handwritten notes on the screen.

WEBCAM

You'd be hard-pressed to find a laptop without a built-in webcam nowadays, but quality varies. If you enjoy family video calls on Zoom, you might want to look for a webcam with a resolution of at least 1080p (also called 2 megapixels and HD). That will make your image appear sharper to the people you're chatting with.

ILLUSTRATIONS: GUILHERME HENRIQUE

Finding Great Deals

You can save a lot of money on a laptop if you buy it in the right place at the right time. Here are our secrets for getting a deal you'll love.

WHERE TO GO

When choosing a retailer, think about more than just price. Online retailers like Amazon and manufacturer websites have a wide selection of laptops, relatively simple ways to choose the specs you want, and the means to safely deliver the product to your door in 48 hours.

But brick-and-mortar retailers like the Apple Store and Best Buy have laptops you can try out, plus experts on hand to answer questions and help with setup and transferring files from one device to the next. Both offer repair services and robust tech support, too. If you need help with something down the road, you simply schedule an appointment with Apple's Genius Bar or Best Buy's Geek Squad.

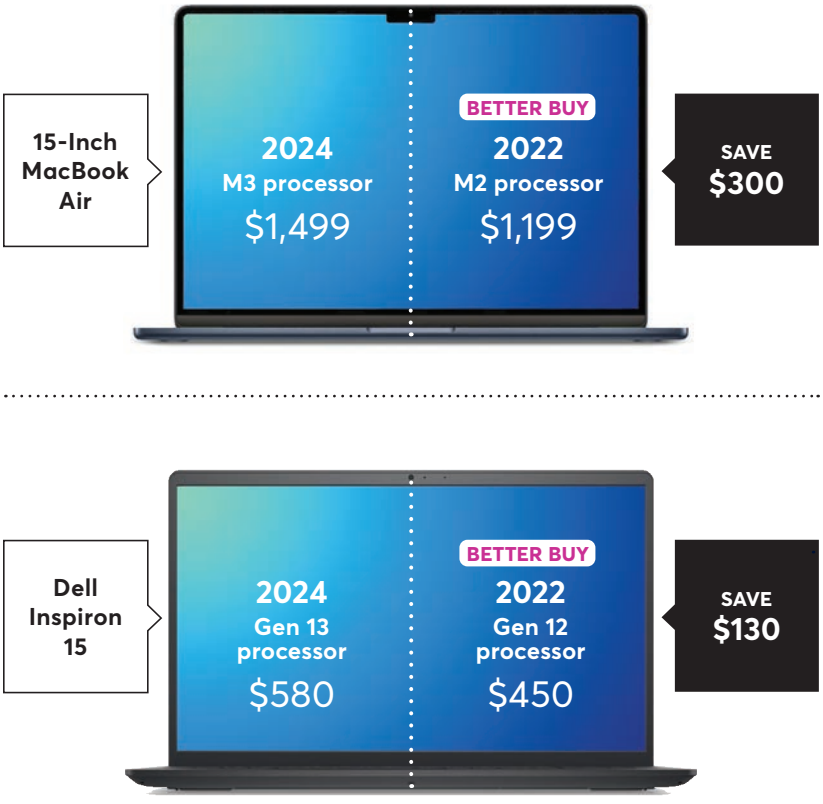
If you do decide to buy a laptop on Amazon and need help later, you can take it to an Apple Store (assuming it's an Apple product) or Best Buy. But you may have to pay a modest fee for the consultation.

THE RIGHT TIME TO BUY

That's now. During the holiday shopping season, every major retailer from Amazon to Walmart serves up great laptop offers. Lesser known online outlets like Adorama, B&H Photo, and Newegg jockey for your business with eye-catching deals, too. The same goes for manufacturers like Dell, HP, and Lenovo. All it takes is a quick Google search for the model you've settled on—like the Dell Inspiron 15—to start comparing prices.

TO SAVE MORE, BUY AN OLDER LAPTOP

A model with a previous-generation processor can cost hundreds less but still do everything you want it to.



CHECK OUT OLDER MODELS

You can often shave $100 or more off the price by choosing a prior-generation model that's still available. How can you spot one of these older laptops? Look at the processor (see above). Apple's latest MacBook Air has an M3 processor. Earlier models use the M1 or M2 and do a great job. On a Windows laptop, you'll be fine with a 12th generation Intel chip.

If you want to save even more, we recommend shopping for a refurbished model. Apple, Lenovo, and other laptop makers have programs that restore trade-ins to near-mint condition, replacing key components and buffing every nick and scratch from the case. The laptop will arrive in fresh packaging, and the company will even give you a new warranty.

Online retailers such as Amazon, Best Buy, and Walmart also sell refurbished products. Just be sure to check the listing for up-to-date details on what kind of testing and certification the sellers do. The sprucing up should ideally include a fresh battery and be done with manufacturer-supplied parts.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS (2)

MAKE YOUR LAPTOP EASIER TO USE

Hours spent using a laptop can strain your eyes, wrists, and back. Here, accessories for staying comfortable, plus computer settings to personalize your experience.

Helpful Accessories

A Wireless Mouse and Keyboard

Logitech M650 Mouse $40/**Signature Slim K950 Keyboard** $80
An external keyboard and mouse let you adjust your workspace to fit your needs, reducing the strain on your wrists, back, and shoulders. Wireless models free you from cords, too. They require batteries, though.

An Adjustable Backpack

InCase Icon Slim Backpack $170
Laptop cases come in a variety of styles. A backpack with adjustable shoulder straps distributes the weight to fit your body, making your laptop more comfortable to carry.

Keep It Cool

Arlo Skye 19-Inch Lap Desk $125
This can lift a steamy computer off your lap and reduce back strain.

Elevate Your Work

Insignia Ergonomic Laptop Stand $30
This stand raises the screen to eye level when paired with a mouse and keyboard.

Smart Settings

Pump up the point size.

ON A MACBOOK
Click on the Apple icon on the top left of the screen > System Settings > Accessibility > Display > Text Size, and use the slider.

ON WINDOWS
Click on the Windows Start icon > Settings > Accessibility > Text Size, and use the slider.

Add closed captions.

ON A MACBOOK
Click on System Settings > Accessibility > Captions, and move the toggle to "on."

ON WINDOWS
Click on Settings > Accessibility > Captions, and move the toggle to "on."

Dictate instead of type.

ON A MACBOOK
Click on System Settings > Keyboard > Dictation.

ON WINDOWS
Click on Settings > Accessibility > Speech > Voice Typing.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results		Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Performance	Display	Battery life, web (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Touchscreen	2-in-1	Processor brand	Processor model name	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)	Native resolution
12- TO 13-INCH LAPTOPS															
✓ **Apple** MacBook Air 13-Inch (2024, M3 10-Core GPU, 16GB)	80	$1,500	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	14	2.7			Apple	M3 (8 core)	16	512	2560x1664
$ **Apple** MacBook Air 13-Inch (2022, M2, 8 Core)	77	$1,000	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	12.75	2.7			Apple	M2 (8 core)	8	256	2560x1664
✓ **MSI** Prestige 13	75	$1,300	⌃	⌃	⌃	⇈	15.5	2.1			Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Dell** XPS 13 9340	71	$1,400	–	–	⌃	⇈	25.5	2.7			Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	512	1920x1200
✓ **Dell** XPS 13 Copilot+ PC 13.4" OLED Touch Laptop	71	$1,900	–	–	⌃	⇈	14.75	2.7	●		Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Lenovo** ThinkPad L13 Yoga Gen 4	70	$1,230	–	–	⌃	⇈	16.5	3.0	●	C	Intel	Core i7	16	512	1920x1200
✓ **Asus** ProArt PX13	67	$2,000	–	–	⇈	⇈	9.25	3.1	●	C	AMD	Ryzen AI 9	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Microsoft** Surface Pro 9 (SQ 3)	66	$1,250	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	15.25	2.5	●	D	Microsoft	SQ 3	8	128	2880x1920
$ **Microsoft** Surface Laptop Go 3 (8GB)	65	$650	–	⌃	–	⌃	12.75	2.5	●		Intel	Core i5	8	256	1536x1024
✓ **Microsoft** Surface Pro Copilot+ (11th Edition)	65	$1,200	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	15.5	2.5	●	D	Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	16	256	2880x1920
Microsoft Surface Laptop Copilot+ PC (7th Edition)	64	$1,200	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	22	3.0	●		Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	16	512	2304x1536
Microsoft Surface Pro 9 (Evo Core i5)	64	$1,000	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	14.75	2.5	●	D	Intel	Core i5	8	256	2880x1920
Microsoft Surface Pro 9 (Evo Core i7)	63	$1,400	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	14.25	2.6	●	D	Intel	Core i7	16	256	2880x1920
Microsoft Surface Pro 9 (Core i5)	61	$1,140	–	⌃	⌄	⌃	14.25	2.5	●	D	Intel	Core i5	8	128	2880x1920
14-INCH LAPTOPS															
✓ **LG** Gram 2-in-1	88	$1,600	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	25.75	2.7	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	1920x1200
✓ **Apple** MacBook Pro 14 (10 Core, M2 Pro)	82	$1,600	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	14.5	3.5			Apple	M2 Pro (10 core)	16	512	3024x1964
✓ **Samsung** Galaxy Book4 Pro 14" (Core Ultra 7)	82	$1,450	⌃	–	⌃	⇈	15.75	2.7	●		Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	512	2880x1800
✓ **Apple** MacBook Pro 14 (11 Core, M3 Pro, 512GB)	81	$2,000	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	15	3.5			Apple	M3 Pro (11 core)	18	512	3024x1964
✓ **Apple** MacBook Pro 14 (8 Core, M3, 512GB)	80	$1,600	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	14.75	3.4			Apple	M3 (8 core)	8	512	3024x1964
✓ **Samsung** Galaxy Book4 Pro 14" (Core Ultra 5)	80	$1,450	⌃	–	⌃	⇈	14.75	2.7	●		Intel	Core Ultra 5	16	512	2880x1800
✓ **Asus** Tuf Gaming A14 (2024)	78	$1,400	–	–	⇈	⇈	15	3.2			AMD	Ryzen T	16	1000	2560x1600
$ **Asus** Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3406)	78	$1,000	–	–	⇈	⇈	16.25	2.9	●		AMD	Ryzen 7	16	1000	1920x1200
✓ **MSI** Summit E14 Flip Evo A13MT-268US	77	$1,695	⌃	⌃	⌃	⇈	17.25	3.5	●	C	Intel	Core i7	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Lenovo** T14s Gen 6 Snapdragon Laptop 21N10000US	77	$1,700	–	–	⌃	⇈	32.5	2.7			Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	32	1000	1920x1200
✓ **Asus** Vivobook S	76	$1,200	–	–	⌃	⇈	14.5	2.9			AMD	Ryzen 9	24	512	2880x1800
✓ **Asus** Zenbook UX3405MA-PH77	76	$1,200	–	–	⌃	⇈	18.5	2.8	●		Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Lenovo** Yoga Slim 7x Copilot+ PC 83ED0001US	75	$1,200	–	–	⌃	⇈	16.5	2.8	●		Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	16	512	2944x1840

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results		Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Performance	Display	Battery life, web (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Touchscreen	2-in-1	Processor brand	Processor model name	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)	Native resolution
14-INCH LAPTOPS *Continued*															
✓ **HP** Spectre 14-EU0013DX x360	75	$1,630	●	●	▲	▲	17.75	3.2	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2880x1800
$ **HP** Envy 14-FA0023DX	74	$600	●	●	▲	▲	14.5	3.3	●	C	AMD	Ryzen 7	16	1000	1920x1200
✓ **HP** Spectre x360 2-in-1 Laptop 14t-eu000	73	$950	●	●	▲	▲▲	15.75	3.2	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 5	16	512	2880x1800
✓ **HP** Omen Transcend 14-FB0023DX	72	$2,000	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	10.75	3.6			Intel	Core Ultra 9	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **HP** Omen 14-fb0013dx	71	$1,300	●	●	▲▲	▲	10.75	3.6			Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Lenovo** Yoga 7i 14	69	$1,050	●	●	●	▲	22.25	3.6	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	1920x1200
✓ **MSI** Stealth 14 Studio A13VE-202US	67	$1,250	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	6.75	3.8			Intel	Core i7	16	512	1920x1200
✓ **Asus** Zenbook Duo UX8406MA-DS76T	67	$1,435	●	●	▲	▲▲	8.5	3.9	●	D	Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	1920x1200
✓ **Microsoft** Surface Laptop Studio 2 (16GB, Iris Xe)	66	$2,000	●	▲	▲	▲	17.75	4.2	●	C	Intel	Core i5	16	512	2400x1600
✓ **Asus** Zenbook Duo UX8406MA-PS99T	66	$1,700	●	●	▲	▲▲	6.25	3.8	●	D	Intel	Ultra 9	32	1000	2880x1800
Lenovo IdeaPad Flex 5 14ALC7	63	$770	●	●	●	▲	16.25	3.5	●		AMD	Ryzen 5	8	256	1920x1200
Asus Vivobook 14 X1404ZA	56	$430	●	●	●	●	10.25	3.1			Intel	Core i3	8	128	1920x1080
Alienware x14 R2 (13th Gen)	42	$1,700	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	7	3.9			Intel	Core i7	16	512	2560x1600
15- TO 16-INCH LAPTOPS															
✓ **LG** Gram Pro	90	$1,500	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	11.5	3.0	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2560x1600
✓ **LG** Gram Pro 16 (Nvidia RTX)	88	$1,800	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	17	2.8			Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	2000	2880x1800
✓ **Apple** MacBook Pro 16 (12 Core, M3 Pro, 512 GB)	87	$2,000	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	25.25	4.7			Apple	M3 Pro (12 core)	18	512	3456x2234
✓ **LG** Gram SuperSlim 15	85	$2,000	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	17.25	2.2			Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	2000	1920x1080
✓ **Samsung** Galaxy Book4 Pro 16" (Core Ultra 7)	85	$1,745	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	15.5	3.4	●		Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	2880x1800
✓ **LG** Gram Pro 16 (Intel Arc)	84	$1,900	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	14.75	2.6			Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	2880x1800
$ **HP** Pavilion Plus	83	$1,200	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	20.25	4.1			Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2560x1600
✓ **Apple** MacBook Air 15-Inch (2024, M3, 8GB, 512GB)	82	$1,500	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	13.75	3.3			Apple	M3 (8 core)	8	512	2880x1864
✓ **MSI** Prestige 16	80	$1,400	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	25.5	3.5			Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	2560x1600
$ **Samsung** Galaxy Book4 360	80	$1,000	▲	●	▲	▲▲	18	3.2	●	C	Intel	Core 7	16	512	1920x1080
✓ **Asus** ROG Zephyrus G16 GU605MI-G16.U94070	80	$2,000	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	10.75	4.0			Intel	Core Ultra 9	16	1000	2560x1600
✓ **Lenovo** Legion 7i 16	79	$1,700	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	9.25	5.0			Intel	Core i7	16	1000	2560x1600
✓ **Asus** Zenbook S 16 (UM5606)	79	$1,700	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	12.75	3.3	●		AMD	Ryzen AI 9 z	32	1000	2880x1800
✓ **Apple** MacBook Air 15-Inch (2023, M2, 256GB)	79	$1,100	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	13	3.3			Apple	M2 (8 core)	8	256	2880x1864
✓ **Lenovo** Legion Pro 5i 16	78	$1,830	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	8.25	5.4			Intel	Core i9	32	1000	2560x1600

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results		Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Performance	Display	Battery life, web (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Touchscreen	2-in-1	Processor brand	Processor model name	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)	Native resolution
15- TO 16-INCH LAPTOPS *Continued*															
Asus Vivobook Pro Q543MJ-U93050	77	$1,500					8.75	4.3			Intel	Core Ultra 9	24	2000	1920x1080
Samsung Galaxy Book4	76	$900					12.5	3.4			Intel	Core 7	16	512	1920x1080
Acer Swift Go 16 G16-71-7902	75	$1,120					10	3.6			Intel	Core i7	16	1000	3200x2000
Acer Predator Triton PT16-51-76XZ	74	$1,600					10.75	5.1			Intel	Core i7	16	1000	2560x1600
Lenovo Legion 5 Pro 16ARX8	74	$1,600					5.75	5.5			AMD	Ryzen 7	32	1000	2560x1600
Asus Vivobook S 15	73	$1,300					15	3.2			Qualcomm	Snapdragon X Elite	16	1000	2880x1620
Dell Inspiron Plus 16" Touchscreen Intel Evo Platform Laptop i7640-7059BLU-PUS	73	$900					26	4.7	●		Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	1000	1920x1200
HP Envy 16-AC0033DX	73	$1,000					18.75	4.3	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra 7	32	2000	1920x1200
Lenovo ThinkPad E16 Gen 2 Laptop 21MA0006US	73	$1,100					13.75	4.1			Intel	Core Ultra	16	512	1920x1200
Dell G16 16	72	$1,600					8	6.1			Intel	Core i9	32	1000	2560x1600
Samsung Galaxy Book Odyssey	72	$1,380					12.25	4			Intel	Core i7	16	512	1920x1080
Asus Vivobook S16 Flip TP3604VA-EB94T	71	$850					10	4.5	●	C	Intel	Core i9	16	1000	1920x1200
Acer Aspire 5	70	$450					12	3.8	●		Intel	Core i5	16	1000	1920x1080
Dell Inspiron i7640-5359BLU-PUS	69	$1,000					20.25	4.4	●	C	Intel	Core Ultra	16	512	1920x1200
HP Victus 15.6" Full HD Gaming Laptop 15-fb2063dx	68	$800					9.75	4.9			AMD	Ryzen 5	8	512	1920x1080
Acer Aspire Vero AV15-53P-71Z7	68	$800					11	3.8			Intel	Core I7	16	512	1920x1080
MSI Cyborg 15	68	$800					6.5	4.5			Intel	Core i7	16	512	1920x1080
Lenovo IdeaPad Slim 3i 15	67	$480					13.75	3.6	●		Intel	Core i5	8	256	1920x1080
HP 15-DY5073DX	60	$800					8.75	3.5	●		Intel	Core i7	16	512	1920x1080
Dell Inspiron 15 i3520-5124BLK	58	$630					9.75	3.7	●		Intel	Core i5	8	512	1920x1080
Acer Aspire 3 A315-24PT-R90Z	58	$600					11	3.8	●		AMD	Ryzen 5	8	512	1920x1080
HP 15-dy5113dx	53	$450					10.25	3.5	●		Intel	Core i3	8	128	1366x768
Alienware M16 R2	52	$1,650					11	5.5			Intel	Core Ultra 7	16	1000	2560x1600

Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/laptops.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in all tests combined with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. Scores between size categories aren't comparable.

Predicted reliability estimates the likelihood that a newly purchased model from a brand will develop problems within the first three years of ownership. Findings are from CR's 2021, 2022, and 2023 Winter Surveys. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend their laptop. **Performance** involves productivity and multimedia app use, web browsing, and 3D games. **Display** reflects clarity, color, contrast, brightness, and glare. **Battery life** is measured while laptop loads a series of web pages over WiFi. **2-in-1** notes whether the model is a convertible (C) or a detachable (D) laptop.

WORSE BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

COOKING ESSENTIALS
P. 30

HOME CARE
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HEALTHY LIVING
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TOP PICKS 2024

TECH
P. 36

OUTDOOR LIVING & YARD CARE
P. 38

AUTOS
P. 40

GREAT PERFORMANCE AND RELIABILITY? CHECK. SAFETY FEATURES YOU CAN COUNT ON? CHECK. AWESOME PRICES? YOU BET!

CR tests thousands of products each year, and many boast all of these qualities, and more. We highlight them in our ratings in every issue. But certain items deserve a special spotlight. They do more than just ace our rigorous tests: They bring something extra to the party, like problem-solving features; the most innovative, sustainable design; or truly excellent value. The 102 products on the pages that follow—from coffee makers to cars, TVs to lawn tools—are the very best of the best, the ones our experts would personally recommend to you.

Read on for CR's Top Picks of 2024.

WE LOVE ... THE BEST KITCHEN HELPERS

FULL-SIZED BLENDERS

ALL-AROUND WINNER

Vitamix Professional Series 750 $700

When it comes to power, the Vitamix blender is tops. It's the best for silky purées and perfectly crushed ice.

86

80

GREAT VALUE

NutriBullet Smart Touch NBF50420 $140

82

STANDOUT FOR SMOOTHIES

Ninja Professional Plus Kitchen System BN801 $220

HAND MIXERS

VERSATILE CHOICE

Breville Handy Mix Scraper $130

Top notch at mixing dough and whipping cream, it also comes with smart attachments, like rubber-tipped beaters that will protect your bowls.

83

74

VERY NICE PRICE

Hamilton Beach Professional 7-Speed 62663 $40

73

IMPRESSIVE CLASSIC

KitchenAid KHM6118CU 6 Speed $80

DRIP COFFEE MAKERS

BEST DRIP MODEL

Cuisinart DCC-T20 Touchscreen 14-Cup Programmable $110

This model makes rich, satisfying coffee every time. For hot and cold brewing options and a built-in frother, see the Ninja, at far right.

90

83

BUDGET-FRIENDLY BREWER

Hamilton Beach 12-Cup Programmable 49465R $40

82

FLEXIBLE PICK

Ninja Specialty CM401 $130

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (INDUCTION BURNER); PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: CONSUMER REPORTS (4); MANUFACTURERS (16). ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER (PORTRAITS)

The Better Deal

FRENCH-DOOR REFRIGERATORS
31 to 33 inches

HIGHER PRICE
$2,300

74
GE GNE25JSKSS

BETTER PRICE
$1,300

74
GE GNE25JYKFS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Lauren Friedman
Lead Editor,
Health & Food

I OWN THIS!

After reporting on the dangers of PFAS "forever chemicals" for years, I knew I wanted a pan that was free of PTFE, also known as Teflon. But I was not willing to sacrifice the convenience of nonstick. That's why I love the ceramic GreenPan, which is PTFE-free and has a quick-release surface.

NONSTICK FRY PAN

GreenPan Reserve Ceramic Nonstick Frypan Set $100

88

THE LOWDOWN

These look-alike fridges offer equally impressive performance, have the same interior features (including a water dispenser and an icemaker), and are from the same brand. So why the $1,000 price difference? We don't know. We do know that one is clearly the better deal.

Duxtop Portable Induction Cooktop Burner 9600LS $110

NEW + COOL

Convenient Cooktop-Expander

If you've ever wished for an extra burner at holiday time (or anytime you're prepping for a crowd), the Duxtop induction burner could be the solution. Imagine a hotplate that outperforms the burners on some full-sized ranges: Plug it in wherever you need it for fast heating, steady simmering, and immediate response when you change the temperature setting.

Oxo Steel Salad Spinner, 6.34 quarts $65

Sleek Salad Spinner

Getting freshly washed greens dry is much easier with this large-capacity spinner. It removed almost 98 percent of the water from lettuce in our tests—and its stainless steel bowl can go right from the kitchen counter to the dining table.

70 **Breville Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC** $400

Toaster Oven Meets Air Fryer

This highly rated toaster oven is a space-saving multitasker. It not only excels at toasting and baking but also is an air fryer, turning out crispy fries, wings, and more in our test labs and in our editors' kitchens. It's large enough to reheat a 13-inch pizza and has a dehydrate setting, too.

NEW + COOL

Out, Darn Spots!

53

Shark StainStriker PX201 $140

This portable Shark carpet cleaner is ideal for handling wine spills, coffee stains, and pet messes as they arise. It's compact and lightweight, and has a long hose, so it's easy to maneuver. It's not meant to clean your whole carpet, though: Use a top-rated full-sized model like the Bissell ProHeat 2x Revolution Pet Pro Plus 3588F instead.

Dreamy Mattress

The Earthfoam latex mattress feels cushy yet firm, offering the best back support you can find and impressive side support, too.

81

Earthfoam Organic Medium $1,000

Innovative A/C Design

What a great idea: The U-shaped Midea has a slot for your window sash so that you can open your window when the unit isn't running. It's a top performer to boot.

85 **Midea U-Shaped MAW08V1QWT** $400

Sonia Gupta
Associate Director, Product Marketing

I OWN THIS!

I bought the Coop pillow because it had great ratings for back and side sleepers and it's customizable. Being able to remove some of the filling is a game-changer—you can adjust it to fit your needs. My husband had back and neck pain before, but now we've both been waking up without stiffness.

90

PILLOW

Coop Sleep Goods The Original $75

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (4); MANUFACTURERS (10)

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

The Better Deal

ROBOTIC VACUUMS

HIGHER PRICE
$1,600

75 **Roborock S8 Pro Ultra**

BETTER PRICE
$350

72 **iRobot Roomba Combo i5**

THE LOWDOWN
The Roborock got top scores for cleaning carpets and bare floors, picking up pet hair, and navigating around furniture. For less than half its price, the iRobot was just as impressive on bare floors and nearly as good on cleaning up carpets and pet hair—and it's quieter.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (CARPET CLEANER)

WE LOVE ... THAT CLEAN FEELING

WASHING MACHINES

OVERALL WINNER
LG WM8900HBA $1,375

This top-rated front-loader not only gets clothes superclean but also saves on water and energy, earning CR's Green Choice designation.

LESS EXPENSIVE FRONT-LOADER
Samsung WF45T6000AW $820

ALL-IN-ONE WASHER/DRYER
Samsung WD53DBA900HZ $3,200

SHEETS

TOP ALL-COTTON SET
Casaluna (Target) Washed Supima Sateen Sheet Set $105 for queen-size

These soft sheets are some of the strongest we've tested, with sturdy seams and tear resistance. They didn't shrink much after multiple washes.

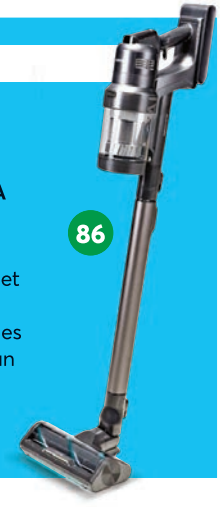
76 BUDGET BEDDING
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Pima Cotton $80

67 SOFTEST CHOICE
Brooklinen Luxe Core $190

CORDLESS STICK VACS

CLEANS UP GREAT & EASIEST TO EMPTY
Samsung Bespoke Jet AI VS28C9762UK/AA $900

The Samsung aced our tests on bare floors and pet hair, and gets into edges well. Neat trick: It recharges in a storage tower that can automatically empty the vacuum's dust bin into an enclosed bag.



LOWER PRICE
Shark Vertex Pro IZ662H $450

CAN STAND UP ON ITS OWN
Miele Triflex HX1 Facelift SMUL1 $600

WE LOVE ... GOOD-FOR-YOU EATS AND GEAR

OLIVE OILS

ROBUST & FLAVORFUL

Lucini Italia Premium Select Extra Virgin Olive Oil

4/5 OVERALL QUALITY

$27 for 25.4 fl. oz., or $1.06 per oz.

Extra virgin olive oil is rich in heart-healthy antioxidants. Our expert testers praised this oil's fresh, full-bodied flavor.

4/5 OVERALL QUALITY

NICE PRICE

Specially Selected (Aldi) Sicilian Extra Virgin Olive Oil $8.50 for 16.9 fl. oz., or 50¢ per oz.

4/5 OVERALL QUALITY

GREAT FOR GIFTING

Wonder Valley Olive Oil $36 for 12.7 fl. oz., or $2.83 per oz.

BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

SUPERB ACCURACY

Omron Platinum BP5450 (Amazon) $79

This precise model allows multiple users to store readings and can detect irregular heartbeats. It's easy to use and has a one-size-fits-most cuff.

EXCELLENT VALUE

A&D Medical UA767F Blood Pressure Monitor $52

TOP WRIST MODEL

Omron 7 Series BP6350 $65

SUNSCREENS

BEST OVERALL CHOICE

Coppertone Water Babies Lotion SPF 50 $9 for 8 oz.

Our tests found that it offers top-notch protection against the UV rays that cause sunburn, skin cancer, and wrinkles. It's reasonably priced, too.

68

BUDGET LOTION

Equate (Walmart) Ultra Lotion SPF 50 $7.30 for 8 oz.

67

EFFECTIVE FACE SUNSCREEN

Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Matte Gel SPF 45 $22 for 1.7 fl. oz.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SODA). PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (12); MANUFACTURERS (2)

The Better Deal

TREADMILLS

HIGHER PRICE **$3,000**

88

Peloton Tread

BETTER PRICE **$1,000**

85

Horizon 7.0 AT

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Kevin Loria
Writer, Health

I OWN THIS!

I bought this Hyperice massage gun after reading CR's test results. Now that I have one at home, I can confirm our findings: Despite its small size, it's surprisingly powerful. I like that it's easy to use, too, and lets me massage hard-to-reach areas on my back.

MASSAGE GUN

Hyperice Hypervolt Go 2
$130

THE LOWDOWN
The Peloton is our top-rated treadmill. But for $2,000 less you can get the folding Horizon 7.0 AT. Unlike the Peloton, which uses only its own online service, the Horizon allows different subscriptions—including Peloton's.

Culture Pop Probiotic Soda
$2.75 for 12 oz.

NEW + COOL

Not-So-Sugary Soda

If you love the fizz of soda but want something lower in calories, these drinks from Culture Pop are a good choice. Their sweetness comes from a splash of fruit juice—not from added sugar or sugar substitutes. The jury is still out on whether the added probiotics can truly improve your gut health, but the flavor we tested (Wild Berries & Lime) is tasty and refreshing.

76

Bern Hudson
$120

Safer E-Bike Helmet

This model from Bern is certified to meet a Dutch helmet standard created for e-bike riders, which requires helmets to have additional protection on the sides and back. That's important if you're traveling at the higher speeds e-bikes allow—and a nice safety perk if you're riding a regular bike.

Bestool Detangle Brush $7

Briogeo Scalp Revival Charcoal + Biotin Dry Shampoo
$25

Good Hair Days Ahead

If you need a detangling brush, this is the one to get. The Bestool worked well for testers with a variety of hair textures and lengths—even very thick, curly hair. For no-wash days, the Briogeo dry shampoo did a great job of absorbing grease without causing an itchy or tight feeling on the scalp.

WE LOVE ... GREAT GADGETS

TVs

EXCEPTIONAL 65-INCH MODEL
LG OLED65G4SUB $3,100

It may be pricey, but this LG is among the very best TVs you can buy, with excellent overall picture quality and top-notch high dynamic range (HDR) performance. Great sound is an additional bonus.

74 WELL-PRICED 65-INCH PICK
Roku 65R8B5/65R8BX $1,200

71 PERFECT 50-INCH FOR A SMALLER ROOM
Samsung QN50Q80D $1,000

SMARTWATCHES

TOP-RATED APPLE WATCH
Apple Watch Ultra 2 GPS + Cellular $800

This ultra-durable watch has an easy-to-read display and the longest battery life of any Apple Watch model. It's water resistant and tracks steps accurately.

NICE PRICE
Fitbit Versa 4 $200

PAIRS WELL WITH A SAMSUNG PHONE
Samsung Galaxy Watch7 (40mm) LTE $350

SMARTPHONES

OVERALL STANDOUT
Apple iPhone 15 Pro Max $1,200

The biggest and best Apple phone we've tested, it has an upgraded camera system and an exceptionally long battery life—52 hours. (We had not yet tested the iPhone 16 line when we went to press.)

BUDGET BUY
OnePlus 12R $520

BEST ANDROID PHONE
Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra $1,300

Tanya Christian
Writer, Home

I OWN THIS!

This doorbell camera helps me keep an eye on my home when I'm not there. It didn't require wiring, so it was easy to set up, and it works with other Ring products, including my backyard floodlight and exterior security cameras.

VIDEO DOORBELL
Ring Doorbell Plus (Battery) $150

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (4); MANUFACTURERS (9)

The Better Deal
HEADPHONES

Less Pricey Streaming

This streaming player from Onn, Walmart's house brand, does well in our tests and packs in a lot of features for its price. Its lost-remote finder feature will come in handy when your clicker takes a dive under a sofa cushion.

73

$ Onn 4K Pro Streaming Device $50

Smart Lock for Renters

This new lock is a great retrofit option that's ideal for renters. It goes over the thumb turn of an existing deadbolt and allows you to remotely control the lock from wherever you are. It also works with most smart-home systems.

72

✓ SwitchBot Lock Pro + Hub Mini Matter Enabled $200

97

✓ Tractive GPS Dog LTE (TRNJAWH) $50

NEW + COOL

Fido Finder

If your dog has ever run off, even for a short time, you'll understand the appeal of a device that updates you on your lost pet's location in real time. The Tractive was the top-scoring pet tracker in our tests: It's light, compact, and sturdy. It's also easy to set up and use, and has an intuitive smartphone app with helpful features, including location history.

HIGHER PRICE $250

74

✓ Sennheiser Momentum 4

BETTER PRICE $50

73

$ Soundcore Life Q20

THE LOWDOWN

These noise-canceling headphones performed similarly in our tests, both earning near top-level sound quality scores. The Sennheisers are a bit sturdier and have a slightly higher predicted reliability score, but the Soundcores are still well above average—for a fraction of the price.

WE LOVE ... EASY YARD CARE

CORDLESS DRILLS

HEAVY-DUTY PERFORMANCE

Makita GFD02D $420

It's a powerful model that makes drilling holes and driving screws fast and easy. It's also quiet and has a long battery run time.

87

LOWER PRICE

Flex FX1171T-2B $230

83

LIGHTWEIGHT CHOICE

Milwaukee 3403-22 $170

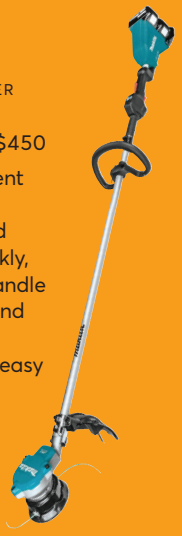
BATTERY STRING TRIMMERS

91

TOP TRIMMER

Makita XRU15PT $450

This excellent tool trims cleanly and edges quickly, and can handle tall grass and aggressive weeds. It's easy to use, too.



90

GOOD BUY

Ego ST1502SA $200

89

EASY TO HANDLE

Makita XRU23SM1 $250

BATTERY LEAF BLOWERS

90

BEST BLOWER

Cat DG651 $350

This is among the most powerful leaf blowers we've tested in recent years. It excels at sweeping and loosening embedded leaves, and it's quiet.

89

EXCELLENT—FOR A LITTLE LESS

Ego LB7654 $300

88

ENOUGH POWER FOR BIG YARDS

Ego LBPX8004-2 $700

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (OUTDOOR PLUG AND GRILL BRUSH). PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (3); MANUFACTURERS (10)

The Better Deal

CHARCOAL GRILLS

HIGHER PRICE **$240**

67

Weber 22" 14402001 $240

BETTER PRICE **$95**

69

Nexgrill 810-KY002 $95

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Amanda Lecky
Deputy Editor

I OWN THIS!

SMART PLUG

TP-Link Kasa Smart WiFi Outdoor Plug EP40 $25

I've used a dusk-to-dawn timer for my holiday lights for years, but it always bugged me that they stayed on all night. So last year I upgraded to this handy gadget. You just plug it into an outdoor outlet and connect it to an app, then you can set a schedule or use your phone to turn the lights on and off from anywhere (like from bed, right before you go to sleep, like I do).

THE LOWDOWN
Weber's iconic kettle is famous. Its rounded shape concentrates heat, and it has two dampers to help control temperature. Nexgrill's version is slightly larger but costs far less. The trade-off is a shorter warranty—just three months vs. 10 years for the Weber.

Grill Daddy Grand Grill Daddy Platinum $110

NEW + COOL

Bye, Bye, Dirty Grill Grates

Keeping grill grates clean is no fun, but neither is eating food that's flavored by last weekend's burnt-on barbecue. The right brush makes cleanup much easier. The Grill Daddy has a water reservoir that creates steam to help soften hard bits so that the brushes (it has two, a large flat one for the grate surface and a small angled crevice brush) can scrub grime from warm grates.

ROBOTIC LAWN MOWER

Gardena Sileno Minimo, 2,700 sq. ft. $650

Lawn Care Assistant

Imagine sitting back while a robot manicures your lawn. It's not just a daydream: A robotic mower can get the job done while you relax. The Gardena Sileno Minimo runs for up to 70 minutes on a single charge (it knows when its battery is low and returns to its dock to recharge) and is best suited to smaller yards.

OUTDOOR PIZZA OVEN

Ooni Karu 12 Multi-Fuel Pizza Oven $299

Pizza Night Goes Gourmet

If you're ready for a dedicated outdoor pizza oven, the Ooni is a smart choice. You can cook with charcoal, wood, or gas (the gas burner is sold separately), and it's compact. The chimney damper helps you regulate airflow while a tight-fitting door keeps heat in, so there's plenty of cooking control.

TOP PICKS ... 2024 NEW CARS UNDER $35,000

SUBCOMPACT SUV

Subaru Crosstrek

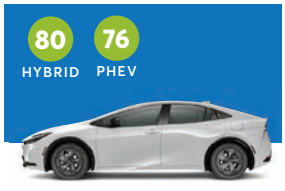
$25,195-$32,195

Redesigned for 2024, the top-rated Crosstrek outperforms other subcompact SUVs, with its comfortable ride, secure handling, and standard all-wheel drive. It has enough ground clearance to allow for some mild off-roading. It's also easy to get in and out of, and has a roomy cabin, supportive seats, and good outward visibility. The base engine is efficient at 29 mpg overall, but acceleration is slow. The uplevel 2.5-liter engine is quicker, quieter, and more satisfying.

MIDSIZED CAR

Toyota Camry Hybrid*

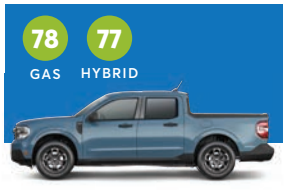
$26,420-$36,845



HYBRID/PHEV CAR

Toyota Prius/ Prius Prime

$27,950-$39,670



SMALL PICKUP

Ford Maverick/ Maverick Hybrid

$23,920-$34,960

COMPACT SUV

Subaru Forester*

$27,095-$37,395

SMALL CAR

Mazda3

$24,170-$36,650

The Mazda3 proves that compact, lower-priced cars don't need to be basic. The sedan and hatchback models are fun to drive, with nimble handling, smooth powertrains, and luxurious-looking interiors.

*Redesigned for 2025.

... AND OVER $35,000

89

PLUG-IN HYBRID SUV

Toyota RAV4 Prime

$43,690-$47,560

85

MIDSIZED SUV

Toyota Highlander Hybrid

$39,120-$53,125

The Highlander Hybrid is a comfortable three-row SUV, with a smooth ride, accommodating seats, thoughtful cabin conveniences, abundant active safety features, and above-average predicted reliability. Fuel efficiency is impressive: Its 243-hp hybrid powertrain got 35 mpg overall in our tests.

72

ELECTRIC VEHICLE

Tesla Model Y

$42,990-$51,490

92 GAS 88 PHEV

LUXURY SUV

BMW X5/ X5 PHEV

$65,200-$90,000

The Better Deal

COMPACT CARS

HIGHER PRICE

$43,725

Ford Escape PHEV

74

BETTER PRICE

$35,940

Kia Niro PHEV

85

THE LOWDOWN

The Ford Escape PHEV is roomy and agile, with an EPA-estimated 37 miles of electric-only range. But it doesn't offer all-wheel drive, and it has a pretty basic interior. The Kia Niro PHEV has a lower 33 miles of electric range (and no AWD, either). But it's more fuel-efficient when running as a regular hybrid and has better predicted reliability. The cabin is spacious, and cargo space is easy to access. Best of all, even considering tax credits on the Ford, the Kia could still save you thousands.

TOP PICKS ... USED CARS

Looking for a car that offers safety, reliability, and good overall performance—all at a low price? Check out our Used Car Top Picks. To point you to a model with the best ownership experience, CR's experts analyzed the performance of models in our tests when they were new and then reviewed our detailed reliability data. We considered only cars that have standard electronic stability control, which is a proven safety feature. Pictured here are highlighted models in specific price ranges—"SUV under $15,000," for example. For some cars, we've included other recommended model years. Keep in mind that used car prices vary greatly and newer models could cost more than our specific picks.

CAR UNDER $10,000

2017 Chevrolet Cruze
$7,300-$9,700

The Cruze stood out in our tests for its comfortable ride, relatively roomy interior, and gutsy power from a turbocharged four-cylinder engine. Among the available conveniences at this price are Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility, heated seats, and a push-button start.

SMALL CAR UNDER $15,000

2019 Hyundai Elantra
$10,750-$15,175

The Elantra boasts user-friendly controls, a roomy interior with a spacious back seat, and impressive fuel efficiency.

HYBRID UNDER $20,000

2021 Toyota Corolla Hybrid
$17,050-$22,000

The Corolla sedan offers frugal pricing, solid reliability, and generous safety features. The hybrid got a stunning 48 mpg overall in our tests. The 2020 model is another good choice.

SUV UNDER $15,000

2018 Honda HR-V
$13,375-$16,725

This practical crossover has a large interior for the category, with a rear seat that can flip and fold easily, along with great fuel economy of 29 mpg overall in our testing. Handling is responsive and secure, but the ride is stiff and the cabin is loud.

SMALL SUV UNDER $20,000

2021 Kia Sportage
$16,500-$22,075

The Sportage has a refined powertrain and secure handling. It's easy to get into, and once seated you'll find the cabin to be comfortable. The model had a significant update for 2020, so choose a 2020 or later for better safety features, updated exterior detailing, and a larger infotainment screen.

CR GREEN CHOICE

HYBRID UNDER $20,000

2018 Toyota RAV4 Hybrid
$16,350-$21,275

The entire RAV4 range was updated in 2016, with fresh styling, a quieter cabin, a smoother ride, and added safety features, along with a new fuel-efficient hybrid version that delivers 31 mpg overall.

3-ROW SUV UNDER $20,000

2020 Mazda CX-9
$17,075-$23,625

The CX-9 stands out, thanks to its responsive steering and handling, and roomy cabin. The best model years are from 2016 to 2020; later updates added frustrating controls.

LUXURY SUV UNDER $20,000

2020 Buick Envision
$16,650-$21,725

The Envision has simple controls, a logical infotainment system, and low maintenance and repair costs. We like the 2016 to 2020 models. For more luxury features, go with a 2019 or 2020.

PICKUP TRUCK UNDER $20,000

2015 Toyota Tacoma
$14,825-$21,875

The Tacoma is versatile and dependable. Models from 2005 to 2015 are impressive off-road or towing when equipped with four-wheel drive and a V6 engine.

SPORTS CAR UNDER $20,000

2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata
$15,275-$21,250

The Miata has excellent handling, reliability, and fuel economy. Models from 2016 on are good choices; output was raised to 181 hp starting with the 2019 model year.

Jake Fisher
Senior Director, Auto Test Center

I OWN THIS!

My family liked our 2006 Toyota Prius so much, we bought a newer version. Our 2019 Prius is more powerful, with better fuel economy and more safety features. It also has all-wheel drive, a help on our steep driveway. Now, our son drives our old 2006 model–and it's still going strong.

COMPACT CAR
2019 Toyota Prius
$16,975-$21,875

Used Car Buying Guide
Use this QR code for quick access to advice, reliability data, and pricing information.

CR's Guide to TEA

Whether you simply dip a bag in a cup of hot water or brew a whole pot with special leaves, here's how to get the best flavor and biggest health benefits.

by Althea Chang-Cook ■ Photography by Sarah Anne Ward

Maybe it's a cold and rainy morning and you need a gentle energy boost. Or you want to linger over a relaxing beverage after lunch with a friend. Perhaps you simply want to wind down at the end of a busy day.

The perfect drink for all these situations, and one found in the pantries of more than 80 percent of U.S. households? A fragrant cup of tea, with a squeeze of lemon or a little milk and honey, or enjoyed as is, with nothing added at all.

But what's actually in that English breakfast or chamomile tea you're sipping? At its most basic, tea is a mix of water and dried plant material. So-called true teas like black (such as English breakfast, Earl Grey, and Darjeeling), green, and white are all made from the leaves of one plant: Camellia sinensis. Their flavors and colors can vary from light and bright to dark and earthy.

Herbal teas—chamomile, peppermint, and ginger, for example—are created from a wide variety of herbs and other plants. Technically, these aren't teas (the official term is tisane), but they offer similar pleasure and comfort, with flavors that can range from sweet to peppery.

You can have your cup on its own or with whatever snacks or meals you like. Today, some enthusiasts even treat tea like wine, pairing different types with the foods that best complement them. For instance, Shabnam Weber, a tea sommelier and president of the Tea & Herbal Association of Canada, says black tea goes well with beef, green with shellfish, and white with peach-based desserts.

While you're deciding which tea to brew, don't forget the likely health benefits. The use of tea as a medicinal

beverage appeared in written texts around the third century in Asia, and there's a growing pile of evidence that those who regularly drink true teas may have a lower risk of health problems such as heart attack, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cognitive decline.

You can probably thank substances known as polyphenol antioxidants—which fight cell damage and inflammation—for the protective properties of true teas. Herbal teas, some long used as home remedies, may certainly have healthful effects as well. But with so many herbal drinks out there, their effectiveness can be harder to prove.

The caffeine that's naturally found in teas like black, green, and white can also be good for you in moderation, and "may help keep your brain and nervous system healthy," says Michelle M. Francl, PhD, a professor of chemistry at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and author of "Steeped: The Chemistry of Tea" (Royal Society of Chemistry, 2024).

With both true and herbal teas, though, there have been some concerns about potential contaminants such as pesticides and heavy metals, including as lead. But when CR's scientists tested 30 popular black, green, and herbal teas, they found little to be concerned about in the vast majority of them. (For more on these results, go to **CR.org/teasafety**.)

Whatever your tea preference, how do you make it as satisfying (and healthful) as possible? Here's what to expect from different types of teas, how to choose the best ones, and expert tips for brewing a perfect pot.

True Tea

While the five main types below are all made from the Camellia sinensis plant, each one's particular taste, aroma, and appearance depend on when the leaves are picked and how they're handled afterward. Their levels of healthful compounds may vary, too.

Black

▸ **WHAT IT IS** This tea is made by crushing then drying the leaves, which releases an enzyme that darkens them—hence the name. Each kind is a bit different. English breakfast, for instance, is usually a blend of two rich-tasting black teas, while the oil of bergamot added to Earl Grey gives it a floral and almost sweet scent.

▸ **FLAVOR** Black tea has plenty of tannins, plant compounds that create the brew's earthy flavor and slight but not unpleasant bitterness.

▸ **BENEFITS** People who often drink black tea may be less likely to have a heart attack, possibly because theaflavins—the polyphenols that dominate—help control inflammation and relax blood vessels.

▸ **CAFFEINE** 30 to 50 mg per 8-ounce cup.

Pu Erh

▸ **WHAT IT IS** Dining at a Chinese restaurant? There's a good chance the tea you're served is pu erh, which is made by fermenting damp tea leaves (sometimes for up to 30 years), allowing fungal molds to make the leaves less astringent, says tea expert Michelle M. Francl, PhD. The leaves are then twisted, sun-dried, and rolled.

▸ **FLAVOR** Depending on how long leaves have been aged, this brownish-red brew can range from mellow to slightly bitter.

▸ **BENEFITS** Studies have linked pu erh to lower risks of obesity, high cholesterol, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease.

▸ **CAFFEINE** 30 to 100 mg per 8-ounce cup.

Oolong

▸ **WHAT IT IS** To create oolong, tea leaves are partly dried and then gently rolled, a process that can give them a yellow-green hue. Oolong is often part of Chinese wedding tea ceremonies, but it's also widely sold in bags and loose for enjoying at home.

▸ **FLAVOR** Like other teas, the taste can vary quite a lot, depending on the growing climate and how the leaves are dried and rolled. Some oolongs are light and floral, others are heavier and more woodsy. "It often has many layers of flavors," says Cindy Li, founder of Uproot Teas in Boulder, Colo.

▸ **BENEFITS** Oolong's primary antioxidants—which are known as theasinensins—may enhance immunity and reduce inflammation.

▸ **CAFFEINE** 30 to 50 mg per 8-ounce cup.

nothing but tea.' —JANE AUSTEN

Green

▸ **WHAT IT IS** These leaves are steamed right after picking, so they retain their green color. There are many types—like sencha, gunpowder, and Hojicha—each with its own characteristics. For the popular matcha, leaves are ground into a powder and whisked into hot water.

▸ **FLAVOR** It typically has a grassy, floral, fruity taste, and slight astringency.

▸ **BENEFITS** Green tea is loaded with the antioxidant epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), among others, and may be heart-protective. One study found that a cup or two a day may cut heart disease risk by 11 to 16 percent. There's been buzz about potential cancer-prevention properties, too, but nothing definitive.

▸ **CAFFEINE** 30 mg per 8-ounce cup; matcha may have a bit more.

White

▸ **WHAT IT IS** Made from young tea leaves that are dried right after being picked, white tea is lighter in both color and flavor than other true teas. While some may be sold simply as white tea, you may also spot boxes and tins labeled as, say, white peony (aka bai mudan) or silver needle, once so prized that they were reserved for royalty.

▸ **FLAVOR** You can expect a delicate floral and grassy taste.

▸ **BENEFITS** White tea has the highest levels of antioxidants, including EGCG, of all true teas—so sipping it often is likely to confer the benefits of all true teas.

▸ **CAFFEINE** 35 mg per 8-ounce cup.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

IS LOOSE TEA BETTER THAN BAGGED?

Tea aficionados will tell you loose tea tastes better. But bagged tea is much more convenient. Is loose tea worth the extra effort? Here's how your options stack up.

Selection

While you'll have plenty of choices among bagged teas, loose tea comes in even more varieties and blends. "There are so many more options—thousands," says tea expert Michelle M. Francl, PhD.

Flavor

It's all about personal preference, but overall, loose teas' flavor has more breadth and depth. The leaves of loose teas are usually larger and typically of higher quality than those in bags, which tend to contain mostly small leaf particles. Plus, loose leaves can expand in a pot or cup, exposing more of their surface area to the water, which enhances the taste. Tea bags, on the other hand, compress the leaves and can absorb some of the flavor compounds. One benefit of bagged, says Francl, is that they're blended to be the same cup to cup. So if you find a bagged tea that you really like, you can expect it to taste the same each time you drink it.

Steeping

Because of their larger leaf size, loose teas can take longer to steep than bagged. You'll get a quicker cup with bagged tea, but that means it's easier to oversteep, which can turn it bitter and acidic. Unlike many bagged teas, loose tea may not release all its flavor compounds in a single brew. If you want a second cup or pot, simply pour more hot water over the leaves you already used.

Caffeine

Caffeine levels depend mostly on the type of tea, how long it steeps, and the water temperature. While these factors are more important than whether it's in a bag or loose, some research indicates that the bag itself may interfere with the release of caffeine from the leaves.

Antioxidants

Studies are mixed on whether bagged or loose teas have more antioxidants. But in practical terms, it doesn't really matter. Both types are rich in these compounds.

Herbal Tea

It can be crafted from a wide variety of plant materials, including herbs, flowers, spices, roots, fruits, and bark. Unlike true teas, most herbals have no caffeine. Some contain just one ingredient, others a blend. Here's what to know about four popular herbal teas.

Chamomile

▸ **WHAT IT IS** Dried chamomile flowers are used either whole (which you'll typically find in loose tea) or broken into pieces (which is how it usually appears in tea bags).
▸ **FLAVOR** This popular tisane is mildly floral and sweet. Uproot Teas' Cindy Li recommends loose, whole-flower chamomile for the best-tasting brew.
▸ **BENEFITS** Chamomile has a reputation as a sleep remedy, and research bears this out: In a study published this year in the journal Complementary Therapies in Medicine, scientists found that drinking chamomile tea before bed led to better slumber. It also has anti-inflammatory properties, may improve digestion, and has traditionally been used as a diuretic.

Ginger

▸ **WHAT IT IS** Whole ginger root that's dried and sometimes ground; this releases its flavors when hot water is poured over it. Some bagged or loose ginger teas you'll see in stores or online, like the one from Yogi, also contain other herbs, such as lemongrass or licorice root.
▸ **FLAVOR** Much like fresh ginger does when it's added to foods, this tea tastes somewhat peppery and slightly sweet, and has a strong and spicy aroma.
▸ **BENEFITS** Ginger has traditionally been used to ease indigestion, nausea, and constipation. Research also suggests that the tea may reduce inflammation and that it has some cancer-preventive properties.

Rooibos

▸ **WHAT IT IS** You'll most often see this under the name rooibos, but it's also known as red bush tea. Rooibos comes from the dried leaves and flowers of Aspalathus linearis, a plant that grows in South Africa. Rooibos tea is sold loose or in bags on its own and is often used as a base for various herbal blends or flavored concoctions like Celestial Seasonings' Madagascar Vanilla Rooibos Tea or Harney & Sons Holiday Herbal.
▸ **FLAVOR** Rooibos has a flowery taste with a woodsy essence. And it's naturally sweet enough that you may not need to add any sugar or honey.
▸ **BENEFITS** Like so many fruits, vegetables, and spices, rooibos is full of the potent antioxidants known as flavonoids. Some research suggests that this tea may help reduce high levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol and blood sugar.

Peppermint

▸ **WHAT IT IS** The dried leaves of the peppermint plant.
▸ **FLAVOR** Peppermint has a sharp and minty taste. You can sip loose or bagged peppermint tea (it's pretty widely available both ways) on its own or temper its strong flavor by choosing a blend like Bigelow Tea's Mint Medley—which also contains its milder cousin, spearmint. You might also want to try other combination teas that include peppermint: These may have ingredients such as ginger, licorice root, or even chocolate. Some of the latter, such as the Art of Tea's Dark Chocolate Peppermint Tea, may have some caffeine, so you'll want to double-check ingredients lists if you're looking for a relaxing beverage to sip before bed.
▸ **BENEFITS** While the scientific research on peppermint tea has been limited, this beverage has long been used as a home remedy to aid digestion and ease gas and bloating. But if you have the chronic heartburn known as GERD, take it easy: Peppermint tea may worsen it.

DUNKIN'
TAZO
CLASSIC CHAI LATTE
Discover a rich blend of black tea, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom & vanilla.
Blend with milk and enjoy hot or iced.
BLACK TEA
32 FL OZ (1 QUART) 946 mL
BLACK TEA CONCENTRATE
Green Tea with GINSENG and HONEY
SWEET TEA
PURE LEAF
Real BREWED TEA

THE TROUBLE WITH SOME TEA

Certain teas sold in bottles or at tea and coffee shops have so much sugar added that they're not much better for you than soda. And "detox" tea blends you may see for sale may even contain potentially harmful ingredients. Here's what to look out for.

Bottled Iced Tea

An 18.5-ounce bottle of sweet tea from Pure Leaf has 42 grams of added sugars, or 10.5 teaspoons, and 160 calories (about the amount in a 12-ounce can of Coke). Bottled green teas may not be any better. For example, Arizona Green Tea with Ginseng and Honey has 34 grams of added sugars, or 8.5 teaspoons, and 130 calories in 16.9 ounces. It's not easy to find a bottled iced tea low in added sugars, so you're probably better off with unsweetened. And don't count on bottled tea to deliver a lot of antioxidants. Some research suggests it has fewer polyphenols than freshly brewed tea.

Bubble Tea

Also called boba tea, this drink contains small balls of tapioca, which are sweet and chewy. It usually has a lot of added sugars, too. For example, a 17-ounce bottle can have as much as 39 grams. Pro tip: If you order bubble tea at a local shop, ask for it with half the sugar or none at all.

Chai Latte

This is black tea infused with spices like cinnamon and cardamom and served with hot or cold milk. Commercial varieties can have hefty amounts of sweeteners: Six ounces of Tazo Classic Chai Latte concentrate contains 24 grams of added sugars. A medium chai latte with skim milk at Dunkin' (220 calories) has 27 grams.

Detox Tea

With names like Lean Green, Liver Cleanse, or just Detox, some loose and bagged teas send the message that they'll help you lose weight or flush so-called toxins out of your body. But there's no evidence any tea has such benefits, says Megan Hilbert, RDN, a registered dietitian with Top Nutrition Coaching in Madison, Wis., who specializes in gut health. "Detox teas are often filled with many untested substances or substances that can cause unwanted symptoms," so it's probably wise to avoid them, she says. For instance, those that contain senna can have a laxative effect. Yerba mate and guarana are high in caffeine, which can increase heart rate and worsen existing heart problems. And garcinia cambogia, another common ingredient, can cause headaches, chest tightness, wheezing, and nausea. Worse, there have been reports of some detox teas causing liver damage.

PHOTOS, NEXT SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS (PRODUCTS)

How to Brew the Perfect Pot

These simple steps guarantee that teatime will be as pleasurable as possible.

1

The best water for tea
It's great to use filtered water for your tea if you can. Here's why: Even good-tasting tap water contains chemicals such as chlorine, or minerals that can affect your tea's flavor. Using a water filter pitcher (such as the one pictured in "3 Great Tea Tools," on the facing page) can ensure that you always have filtered water on hand when you want to brew a pot of tea. Just how much should you heat your water? Boiling is ideal for black, pu erh, and herbal teas. Water that's steaming—but not boiling—is considered best for oolong, green, and white teas. Water that's too hot can "burn" the tea leaves and change the flavor of the brew.

2

The right amount to brew for a pot
Using tea bags? Two should do for a typical teapot. When it comes to loose teas, a general rule is 1 teaspoon for each cup of water in the pot. Some tea types may be best with more or less, however, so you'll want to follow any directions on your tea's box or tin. Prefer a stronger tea? Use more leaves instead of letting your brew steep longer. Steeping too long can make it taste overly bitter.

3

Infuser or loose?
Spooning loose tea right into the pot will give your leaves the maximum amount of room to expand and develop their full flavor. But you may then need a strainer to keep the tea leaves out of your cup. Consider using an infuser, which is more convenient; opt for a larger one to allow hot water to surround the leaves. Some infusers are made for use in pots and others for single cups (see "3 Great Tea Tools," on the facing page).

4

How long to steep
Proper steeping is crucial for the best taste—and to maximize the brew's antioxidant levels. The ideal: You're looking for the sweet spot where you get the most flavor from the leaves without oversteeping. Check the tea box or tin label for a recommended time, or use the quick steeping guide below.

Black: 3 to 5 minutes

Pu erh: 6 to 7 minutes

Green: 2 to 3 minutes

Oolong: 3 to 4 minutes

White: 3 to 4 minutes

Herbal: 4 to 6 minutes

5

Sip it your way
You can drink tea straight, of course, or with a squeeze of lemon to sharpen the flavor. Milk can mellow black tea by neutralizing some of its tannins. Green, white, and herbal teas are traditionally drunk without milk, which may overpower their typically delicate taste. For sweeteners, the best are those that dissolve quickly, like table sugar, agave syrup, and honey. A honey dipper (a wooden tool you dip into a honey jar before letting the sweet stuff drip into your tea) or honey stick (a straw filled with one serving) can keep things from getting too sticky.

'Tea is to the body as music is to the soul.' —EARLENE GREY

3 GREAT TEA TOOLS

ZeroWater Ready-Pour ZD-010RP $35

A countertop pitcher is an easy way to filter water. This one is certified to remove chlorine, lead, and PFAS.

Cuisinart PerfecTemp Cordless Electric Kettle CPK-17 $68

Electric kettles bring water to a boil quickly. This model has six temperature settings.

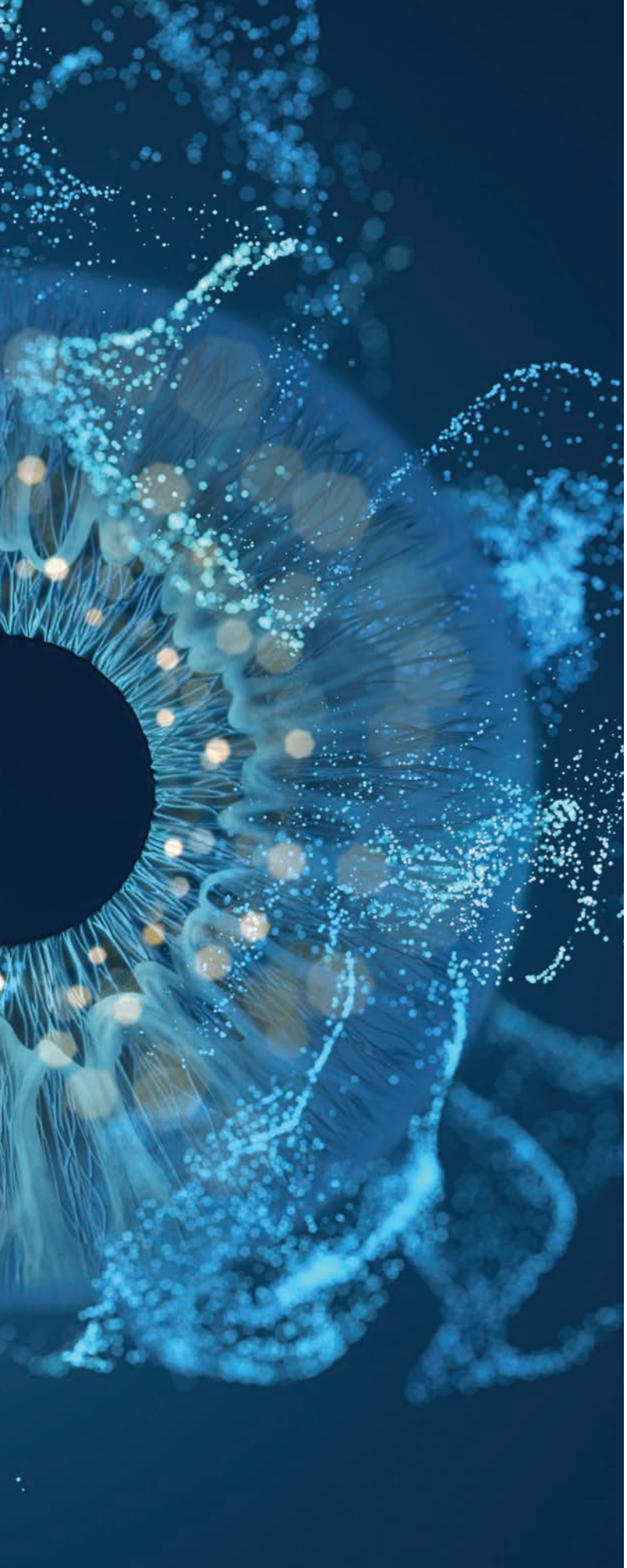
Oxo Tea Infuser Basket $15

This fits nicely over a mug and is large enough to give the leaves room to expand.

Cataracts, dry eyes, glaucoma, and other eye problems become more common with age. But these can be treated—and sometimes even cured—if you know the early signs and act fast.

BY KEVIN LORIA

HOW TO KEEP YOUR VISION SHARP



IN LIFE, FEW THINGS ARE CERTAIN.

But one is: It becomes harder to see well as you age. "There are three things we cannot avoid: death, taxes, and presbyopia, the gradual loss of the ability to read up close," says Nicole Bajic, MD, an ophthalmologist at the Cleveland Clinic.

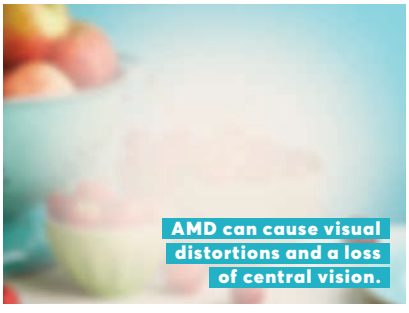
The need for reading glasses is just one of many vision changes we may experience. But later-in-life eyesight issues can often be treated or cured, says Joshua Ehrlich, MD, an associate professor of ophthalmology, and visual sciences and research associate professor in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Most people 40 and older should have a comprehensive eye exam and follow-ups (typically, every one to two years). That way, emerging problems can be caught early, when they're more likely to respond to treatment, says Michelle Andreoli, MD, an ophthalmologist at Northwestern Medicine in Illinois and clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. For this, it's reasonable to see either an optometrist—whose four-year doctor of optometry (OD) degree has trained them to diagnose and manage many eye diseases—or an ophthalmologist, a medical doctor who can perform eye surgery. (An ophthalmologist is a good choice if you have a serious eye disease.)

Your eye doctor will assess your vision and ocular health, but you should also stay attuned to any potential issues in between appointments. To help, here are eight eye problems that often arise as we get older, and expert advice on how to prevent, spot, and handle them.

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

AMD damages the macula, the area of the retina responsible for central vision: what you see when you look straight ahead. In the more common dry AMD, protein deposits form under the retina and the macula may thin. This can progress to wet AMD, when abnormal blood vessels grow under the retina. Those can leak and scar the macula, causing a partial or total loss of central vision.



AMD can cause visual distortions and a loss of central vision.

WHO'S AT RISK: Being over 75 triples your risk, Bajic says. Caucasian people and those with AMD in the family are also at higher risk. Cigarette smoking, hypertension, a diet high in saturated fat, and being overweight are all associated with increased odds of AMD as well.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Early noticeable symptoms can include vision distortions, such as blurriness. As it develops, AMD can make straight lines appear wavy and make it harder to see the details of objects, whether they're near or far.

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Your doctor may catch this during a dilated eye exam before you notice any issues, but reach out if you experience vision distortions. Some forms of dry AMD can be slowed with daily supplements called AREDS. In 2023, the Food and Drug Administration approved two drugs that may also delay vision loss when injected into the eye: pegcetacoplan and avacincaptad pegol. For wet AMD, laser surgery or regular eye injections of anti-VEGF drugs, which dry up and reduce the number of abnormal blood vessels, may stop the leaking and bleeding that can damage vision, Ehrlich says.

CATARACTS

This clouding of the normally clear lens that's behind your pupil can make the world look blurry, hazy, and less colorful.

Cataracts make vision cloudy and blurry.

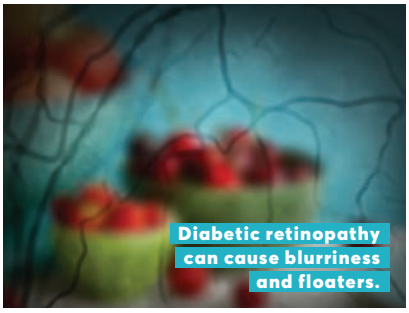
WHO'S AT RISK: Everyone is likely to develop cataracts in later life. But family history and conditions such as diabetes make them more likely, as do eye injuries, smoking, steroids, and exposure to sunlight without UV-protective sunglasses.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: They include blurry vision, light and glare sensitivity, difficulty seeing (and driving) in low light, and bright colors appearing faded. An optometrist or ophthalmologist can diagnose cataracts during an exam, and monitor them until they affect vision enough to need to be treated.

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: A common outpatient surgery–performed over 3 million times a year in the U.S.–involves swapping out the cloudy lens for a new, artificial one.

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Over time, high blood sugar can damage retinal blood vessels. This can cause swelling in the retina and macula, a common cause of vision loss. Later, this can lead to the growth of new abnormal blood vessels in the retina, which can bleed, affect vision, and potentially cause a detached retina—a medical emergency. (See "How to Spot an Eye Emergency," on page 56.)



Diabetic retinopathy can cause blurriness and floaters.

WHO'S AT RISK: People with diabetes, especially if their blood sugar is not well controlled. And the longer you've had diabetes, the higher your risk. Retinopathy can also affect people with other chronic conditions, such as hypertension. Controlling blood pressure and cholesterol can reduce risk.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Often none at first. Eventually, blurry vision or vision that alternates between blurry and clear, floaters (tiny specks in your vision), poor night vision, and blank or dark areas in your view.

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Controlling high blood sugar is most important, and can often prevent vision loss. Certain people are candidates for injections in the eye to reduce swelling in the retina and macula, primarily with the same anti-VEGF drugs also used to treat wet AMD.

ILLUSTRATION, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES. ILLUSTRATIONS, THIS PAGE AND FOLLOWING SPREAD: ERIC HEINTZ; GETTY IMAGES

DROOPY EYELIDS

Excess skin (dermatochalasis) or muscle weakness (ptosis) can lead to difficulty fully opening the upper eyelid.

WHO'S AT RISK: Aging can lead to loose skin that forces the eyelid to droop, and aging or injury can stretch or damage the levator muscle, which lifts up the eyelid. Both of these issues typically arise between ages 50 and 70.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Difficulty fully opening your eyes, which can block vision. An ophthalmologist will do an exam and may use imaging tests to identify the cause.

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Prescription eye drops that temporarily improve eyelid muscle function are used to manage some cases of ptosis, while surgery is often used to remove excess skin or strengthen or reattach the levator muscle. Insurance may cover surgery that is deemed medically necessary.

DRY EYES

Tears help keep your eyes moist and clean, but some people don't produce enough, or their tears evaporate too quickly. Untreated, severe "dry eye" can lead to corneal ulcers or abrasion on the cornea.

WHO'S AT RISK: Anyone can develop dry eye, but it's more common in women, especially after menopause. Certain prescription medications, including blood pressure and allergy drugs, may also cause dry eye, and over-the-counter decongestant eye drops marketed to reduce redness may worsen it over time.

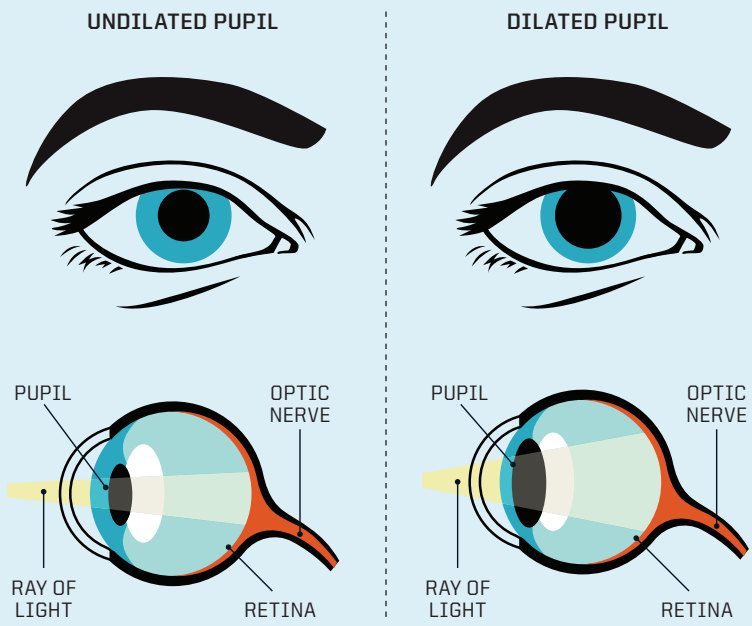
ILLUSTRATIONS BY T.M. DETWILER

The Two Eye Tests You Really Need

There's good reason—beyond updating a glasses prescription—to get routine eye exams: If something's wrong, your doctor will almost always be able to see it. "Many diseases of the eye are diseases of architecture," says Michelle Andreoli, MD, an ophthalmologist at Northwestern Medicine in Illinois and clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Here, two tests everyone generally must have along with a basic exam.

1. Dilated Eye Exam

A dilated eye exam uses special eye drops to open up your pupil and let more light into your eye. This allows your provider to see what's happening inside your eye, often before you notice any changes to your vision, Andreoli says. It can give your doctor a good sense of your eye's health because it provides a full view of the retina and optic nerve. And it's the best way to detect diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy early on. Some people who don't want to have their eyes temporarily dilated may be offered what's called retinal imaging—a photographic exam of the back of their eye. But retinal imaging is not a replacement for a dilated eye exam, and it can miss certain problems.



2. Eye Pressure Check

In this test, your doctor will numb your eye with drops, then use a device to check the pressure inside your eye and monitor for glaucoma. Initial glaucoma changes are often very subtle, but detecting and treating them early can prevent later vision loss.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Eye irritation, discomfort, and redness; a stinging, burning, or scratchy sensation; blurred vision while reading; and paradoxically, an overload of tears–as your eyes try to compensate.

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Over-the-counter artificial tears may provide enough lubrication. But some people need prescription eye drops that increase tear production, tiny plugs to slow or stop tears from draining, or surgery to seal the puncta (tiny openings that drain tears).

GLAUCOMA

A clear liquid called aqueous humor—which nourishes the eye and keeps it inflated—constantly flows into and drains out of your eye through an area between your iris and your cornea. With glaucoma, this fluid doesn't drain as fast as it's produced, allowing pressure in the eye to build up over time and damage the optic nerve.

Loss of peripheral vision is a symptom of glaucoma.

WHO'S AT RISK: The likelihood starts to rise after age 40, especially if you have high eye pressure, diabetes, or hypertension; you use steroids long-term; or you've had a previous eye injury. Family history plays a role, and people of African, Hispanic, or Asian heritage are at higher risk.

How to Spot an Eye Emergency

While certain eye problems progress over time, others may be fast-moving and need immediate care. A case in point is narrow-angle or angle-closure glaucoma—which can cause vision loss within hours. This can be "exquisitely painful" in and around the eye and is often accompanied by nausea and vomiting, says Joshua Ehrlich, MD, an associate professor of ophthalmology and visual sciences at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. If you experience these symptoms, head to the emergency room, unless you can be seen immediately by an ophthalmologist.

In general, you should call an eye doctor or go to the ER right away if you notice any abrupt, dramatic vision change or experience physical trauma to your eye, says Nicole Bajic, MD, an ophthalmologist at Cleveland Clinic. Vision changes that call for fast action include sudden vision loss, blurriness, a shower of floaters, a curtain or shade across your sight, double vision, and severe pain in the eye, especially if it's accompanied by nausea or headache.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Vision loss that usually starts from the periphery. Some people don't notice glaucoma until they've lost nearly all vision, and early treatment can slow or stop disease progression–one reason regular eye exams are essential. The uncommon narrow-angle form of glaucoma, which is accompanied by sudden vision changes and severe pain, is an emergency (see "How to Spot an Eye Emergency," at left).

THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Prescription eye drops to help manage the production and drainage of fluid from the eye can sufficiently lower eye pressure for some people. Laser therapy is another potential first-line treatment. Surgery to improve the eyes' drainage system is more invasive but can be the most effective way to control eye pressure.

POSTERIOR VITREOUS DETACHMENT (PVD)

The vitreous, a clear, jellylike substance that fills the back of the eye, is attached to the retina by tiny fibers. Over time, the vitreous becomes less solid, and can pull away from the retina.

Vitreous detachment can cause floaters and light flashes.

WHO'S AT RISK: This happens to most people by age 70. It's more common among people who are nearsighted, have had eye surgery, or have cataracts or diabetes.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Flashes of light or floaters, which are tiny specks, lines, or circles in your field of vision. Sometimes, people experience a shadow, curtain, or streak of light moving across their vision, which may indicate an emergency (see "How to Spot an Eye Emergency," on the facing page).
THE RIGHT TREATMENT: This is typically benign, and floaters and flashes usually become less noticeable over time on their own. Laser therapy or surgery is generally not recommended. But see an eye doctor as soon as possible if you have symptoms: In some cases, PVD can lead to a retinal tear or detachment, which requires immediate treatment.

RETINAL DETACHMENT

The vitreous can stick to the retina and pull on it. If the retina tears or detaches from the back of the eye, this can cause permanent vision loss. It requires urgent attention.

Floaters, lights, and a shadow or curtain can be signs of retinal detachment.

WHO'S AT RISK: People with prior eye surgery or eye injuries, nearsightedness, a previous retinal tear or detachment in the other eye, or weak areas in the retina that an eye doctor has noticed in a previous exam.
SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Flashing lights that can look like shooting stars, many sudden new floaters, or a shadow or curtain over all or part of your vision.
THE RIGHT TREATMENT: Act fast. Go to the emergency room if you can't see an ophthalmologist or optometrist right away. An examination will reveal what the best treatment is for you. The options include laser therapy (which can sometimes seal tears or breaks) and surgery to reattach the retina.

Secrets to Getting Great Glasses

1. Go in person. Shopping for eyeglasses online can lead to serious savings. But the more complex your prescription, the better it is to buy glasses in person. Progressive lenses, in particular, require expertise for a proper fit. Plus, an in-store optician can help you choose the frames that best suit your lenses. For example, thick lenses in weighty frames may make for heavy glasses.

2. Shop around. Even if you had your eye exam at your favorite optical shop, it's worth taking your prescription to at least one other retailer to check what they're charging. Costco and Warby Parker, for instance, two of CR's top-rated eyeglasses retailers, may offer lower prices than other chains, your neighborhood optical shop, or your eye doctor's office.

3. Consider these two helpful coatings. Have a strong eyeglass prescription or finding that you struggle with night driving? An anti-reflective coating will help more light reach your eyes. And while most lenses come with protection from ultraviolet light, if yours don't, adding UV coating is also important. (Be sure to check when shopping.)

CR RATES EYEWEAR STORES

These three earned strong marks for quality, price, customer service, and more.

Costco Optical
80 OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE

Warby Parker
74 OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE

Sam's Club Optical
73 OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE

Ratings are based on Consumer Reports' 2022 Fall Survey, in which 11,450 CR members provided responses about eyeglass purchases made within the two years leading up to October 2022. Ratings reflect the experiences of CR members, who might not be representative of the general U.S. population.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (COSTCO OPTICAL); MANUFACTURERS (REMAINING EYEWEAR)

THE VERY BEST APPS FOR...

health emergencies, managing your money, and much more.

BY THOMAS GERMAIN Illustrations by Andrew Nye

OST AND FOUND
911
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Millions of apps are available for your phone, but you only need a handful to make daily life easier—from paying bills to creating shopping lists to enjoying podcasts. Here, we list the most important apps, including the ones that come with your device (be it an iPhone or Android phone) and others you can download from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. And because great features aren't always easy to find, we also reveal secrets for getting more value from these essential apps.

Handling Emergencies

Set up these apps to prepare for when things go wrong, including losing your phone or handling a health crisis.

Apple Find My

It's easy to find a misplaced iPhone—if you've set up things ahead of time. Open the phone's settings, click on your name, and then on Find My to turn on the feature. Later, you'll be able to go online from a computer to find the phone. You can even make it generate a chime to help you find it under the sofa cushions.

Google Find My Device

Got an Android phone? Set up Google's Find My Device in case you misplace the phone later. Open the Settings app, tap Google, and hit Find My Device. (It may be under All Services on some phones.) If you ever need to find the phone, you can access Find My Device in a computer browser.

ICE Medical Standard

ICE, short for "In Case of Emergency," provides critical information to first responders if you're ever incapacitated. Enter details such as allergies, medications, and emergency contacts in this app, then create an image to use for your lock screen background, enabling first responders to see the information at a glance.

FEMA

This app, from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, delivers critical information during emergencies such as major storms. Set your location and you'll receive real-time weather alerts, along with details about emergency shelters in your area, if they become necessary. The app also has advice on preparing for emergencies.

First Aid: American Red Cross

The First Aid app from the American Red Cross delivers step-by-step instructions for addressing situations including allergic reactions, burns, and dehydration. A hospital finder will show you nearby facilities. Just tap on one to open your GPS mapping app.

Calling 911

In a life-threatening situation, you know to call 911. But what if you don't have cell service? Try it anyway. Another cellular provider may have service in your location, and that company will patch through a 911 call. No service at all? Any iPhone since the iPhone 14 will let you get help by satellite. Start by calling 911, and follow the prompts. You'll be communicating by text rather than a voice call.

Handling Money

Set up your phone's digital wallet to safely pay at a register. Additionally, get your bank's app for tasks like handling bills and checking balances. Want to send money to a friend? Read on for the best options—and important info on safety.

Apple Wallet

This built-in app can safely store credit and debit cards, letting you tap-to-pay at a register. Open the Wallet app and tap the plus sign in the upper right to add cards. The Wallet app can also store documents such as airline boarding passes, tickets to events, and—depending on where you live—transit cards and your driver's license.

Samsung Wallet

Samsung's Wallet app functions much like Apple's. You can add credit and debit cards, along with items such as retailer member membership IDs, boarding passes, and event tickets.

Cash App

Tools like Cash App let you send money to another person from your bank or debit card. Consumer Reports' testing has found that this app, along with Apple Cash (just for Apple users), Venmo, and Zelle have strong security protections, though policies on reimbursing fraud victims vary widely. But no matter which of these you use, tread carefully. None of these companies will help if you accidentally send money to the wrong person or type in the wrong amount.

Banking Apps

Most banks have mobile apps that will let you do tasks such as checking your balances, paying bills, finding a routing number, and setting up a variety of useful alerts. You can easily deposit checks by snapping a photo, saving yourself a trip to an ATM.

PROTECT YOURSELF
The government's FEMA app can help you respond quickly to severe weather warnings.

Taking Better Notes

Get more use out of your phone's built-in note-taking app by exploring hidden features. Want a notes tool that does more? Download a simple but robust alternative.

Apple Notes

This built-in tool goes beyond making simple lists. For instance, you can collaborate on a note, such as a list of restaurants to try on vacation, if you and a friend both have iPhones with Notes turned on in your iCloud settings. Create a note in the app's iCloud folder, then tap the share icon. One more trick: Use the app to scan documents such as invoices. Simply tap the camera icon at the bottom of any note.

Samsung Notes

The Samsung Notes app has a number of hidden functions. One lets you write your notes with your finger or a stylus, and then edit the text just as though you had typed it using a keyboard. Open a new note, tap on the pencil icon, and start writing. Next, tap the icon with an uppercase "T." Select your handwritten note and then tap Convert.

Any.do

This app makes it easy to organize multistep tasks and see to-do lists alongside items from your calendar app. There are paid tiers, but the most important features are free, like a voice-recognition tool that lets you add to-do lists verbally, including the dates and times when you want to receive reminders. A shopping list feature can automatically group your groceries into categories, then assign an aisle to each group to save time at the store.

Staying Healthy

Your phone can help with everything from counting your steps to giving you medication reminders. Want to track what you eat as well? We have a suggestion for that.

Apple Health

The iPhone's built-in Health app is packed with features. Open the Browse tab to get started. Under Activity, you'll find a tracker that counts your steps and flights of stairs. The Medications tab helps you schedule reminders; you can choose an icon with the color and shape of each pill or capsule as a visual aid. Under the Sleep tab, use the Time in Bed function to estimate your sleep based on when you put down and pick up your phone.

Samsung Health

This built-in app includes a step tracker, medication reminders, and simple tools such as a button that helps you log your daily water intake. The interface is very simple to use. You'll see all the features right from the first screen when you open the app.

MyFitnessPal

MyFitnessPal makes it easy to log your intake of calories and nutrients, such as carbohydrates, fat, protein, and vitamins. If you enter your diet and fitness goals, along with details like your height, age, and weight, the app will make daily adjustments based on your activity level.

Going Places

GPS apps are must-haves for travel even if you're taking a bus or train, not your car. Venturing far from home? Download Mobile Passport Control to clear U.S. customs faster, plus airline and car-rental apps.

Google Maps

You've found a parking spot. Now tap the blue dot that shows your location, and hit Save to remember where you left your car. Going somewhere with no cell service and want to make sure you can find your way home? Download a map before you leave by looking up your destination. Tap on the location's name, then on the three dots indicating more functions, and click "Download offline map."

Waze

Waze is owned by Google but works differently from Google Maps. It quickly reroutes you around traffic by harnessing real-time data collected from other Waze users on the road. You'll get live alerts to hazards including disabled cars and roadwork.

Apple Maps

Many iPhone owners never open the phone's built-in GPS app. But Apple Maps has essentially all the features of Google Maps. Which one you prefer is a matter of personal preference. Our advice to iPhone users: Give it a try.

Mobile Passport Control

Coming back to the U.S. from abroad? Download the free Mobile Passport Control app to access a shorter line for talking to a customs agent. You enter your passport information and answer questions such as the value of any souvenirs. You can enter information for multiple travelers. (Unlike Global Entry, it doesn't include TSA PreCheck for quicker security screening.)

Airline, Car-Rental Apps

Before you go on vacation, download your airline and car-rental apps. They can make it easier to check in for a flight and learn about delays. Some rental companies, such as Hertz, let you use an app to skip the check-in counter when you pick up a car.

Listening for Free

You don't have to pay for music streaming to enjoy tunes and podcasts on the go. Get Spotify (or one of its competitors) for music and Overcast for podcasts.

Spotify

You don't need to pay to access millions of songs on Spotify. But there are trade-offs if you choose not to subscribe to the popular music streaming app. You'll have to put up with ads, and you can listen to music only on shuffle. The songs in an album will play in random order, with other, similar songs mixed in. The free versions of Spotify's competitors have similar limitations. If you're already paying for an Amazon Prime account, make sure to download the Amazon Music app. You won't be fed ads, but you'll have to listen to your music on shuffle. (A premium tier, Amazon Music Unlimited, doesn't have that restriction.)

Overcast

Music apps work fine for listening to podcasts, but Overcast includes features that improve the experience, which you'll appreciate if you listen to lots of them. For instance, Smart Speed skips over silences, while Voice Boost normalizes the volume of all the speakers' voices.

Turning Your Phone Into a TV

Next time you're waiting in a doctor's office, use these apps to watch a movie, a favorite TV series, or even the news. (But don't forget your headphones.)

Netflix

The app lets you access the same content you would on a TV. You can also download many shows (though not all) before leaving home, so you don't have to rely on the slow WiFi network at a medical office or gym. Look for the download icon next to movies and shows. It's not just Netflix, of course—Hulu, Max, and other services have their own phone apps.

Hoopla

Got a library card? If you do, download the Hoopla app, register, and start streaming movies, other videos, and even audiobooks for free. The selection is slimmer than what you'll find on a big streaming platform, but Hoopla does have everything from martial arts films to Golden Globe winners. You can access each movie for 72 hours.

Cable Companies

If you pay for cable TV, the company probably has an app that lets you sign in to your account and then watch most of the same channels on the small screen. You can do the same if you use a streaming service with live TV channels (such as Hulu + Live TV).

A FEW FUN APPS TO DOWNLOAD

PlantNet

PlantNet lets you identify plants by snapping a picture, whether it's a tree in a city park or a mysterious flower that's popped up in your yard. In our experience, the app is extremely fast and reliable. It gives you the name of the plant, photos shared by other people in your region so you can double-check the accuracy, and links to websites where you can learn more.

JustWatch

There are so many streaming services that it's hard to figure out which one has the movie or TV series you're hoping to see. Download JustWatch and enter the title you're looking for, and the app will tell you where it's streaming. You can also set up a watchlist for movies that aren't available yet.

SuperCook

Plug in the ingredients you have in your fridge and pantry by clicking on names in a list, and the app serves up recipes from all over the web that use only those items. It's a great tool for discovering new recipes and for suggestions of quick-to-make classics. The app will also suggest recipes you can make with the addition of one or two simple ingredients.

$350*

*THAT'S HOW MUCH YOUR MEDICAL BILLS COULD COST YOU

Even with Medicare, if you suffer a serious illness, your costs can be very high. Here's how to protect yourself.

BY LISA L. GILL • ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEN SHMULEVITCH

It **CAN HAPPEN SO QUICKLY.** One day, you're feeling fine. The next, you're dealing with a serious diagnosis, possible surgery, multiple medications, physical therapy, the works. You want to focus on getting better, but it's hard when the bills start rolling in. Maybe you thought Medicare was going to be enough. It might not be.

In fact, more than three-quarters of people over 65 will be told at some point that they have a serious or chronic medical condition, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Another report by the Employee Benefit Research Institute says a couple in retirement would need as much as $350,000 to pay for their healthcare even if they have Medicare and an average supplemental plan.

So what can you do if you get big medical bills? According to Frederic Riccardi, president of Medicare Rights, a consumer advocacy organization, don't panic. There are ways to amp up your coverage and negotiate bills in order to lower or even eliminate them (see "Hit With a Big Medical Bill? Do This," on page 69).

First, though, know that making changes to your Medicare coverage can go a long way toward stemming the tide of bills, whether you have a sudden illness or you're continuing to deal with something chronic. Here, the questions to ask yourself right now, and what to do to protect your money.

CHECK YOUR INSURANCE

Perhaps when you signed up for your plan at age 65 you were in pretty good shape, taking blood pressure meds and multivitamins but not much else. Then maybe you developed some more serious issues. As a result, if you're on original Medicare, sometimes known as traditional Medicare, your out-of-pocket costs for deductibles, copays and coinsurance are getting out of hand. Or if you're on a Medicare Advantage plan, maybe the specialist you need to see is not in your network. Or the prescription drug you need isn't covered well—or at all—which can happen no matter which type of plan you're on.

Don't worry: You do have choices, Riccardi says. For example, you might be able to find a different Advantage plan with a provider network that's better for you. Or you may be able to add a supplemental plan, also called a Medigap plan, to your original Medicare to help pick up more of the costs. Drug plans change every year; a new one may cover the drugs you need more robustly. You can even switch from original Medicare to Medicare Advantage insurance.

To pick something that fits you better, set up an online account at Medicare.gov if you don't have one already. There you'll be able to see your present plan's Summary of Benefits and Coverage and compare it with other plans for 2025.

Open enrollment this year is from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7 (for original Medicare) and from Jan. 1 to March 31 (Medicare Advantage). As those deadlines approach, here's how to think about possible changes to make, depending on the type of insurance you currently have.

Have your copays and deductibles gotten too high?

If you don't have one already, consider adding a supplemental (Medigap) plan to your original Medicare (parts A and B). This provides extra insurance to help you cover your copays, coinsurance, and deductibles. Some Medigap plans also have an out-of-pocket limit, starting around $3,500. Reach it and the plan

Have a sudden illness or newly diagnosed chronic condition? Making changes to your Medicare coverage can help stem the tide of big bills.

will pick up 100 percent of your costs.

It's true that it's best to add a supplemental plan within the first six months of signing up for Medicare because if you wait longer, in all but four states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and New York) you can be denied coverage or be charged more if you have a preexisting condition, according to Medicare Rights. But there are plans around that may still cover you, says Jack Hoadley, PhD, professor emeritus at the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown University, so don't hesitate to look.

Supplemental plans can cost about $30 to more than $300 a month, but they may be worth it because they often limit your exposure to high costs, according to Riccardi.

Should you switch from original Medicare to an Advantage plan?

Another option is to sign up for a Medicare Advantage plan. This is especially worth considering if you're denied a supplemental policy. The pros include low monthly premiums—averaging $55 per month, according to health policy research firm KFF. The plans cover prescription drugs and might also have certain vision, dental, and hearing benefits.

On average, the plans have annual out-of-pocket limits of $4,882 for in-network treatment, per KFF. The trade-off: a smaller network of doctors and hospitals.

Should you pick a different Medicare Advantage plan?

The number of Advantage plans available to you depends on where you live, but many people will have more than three dozen choices. So let's say you're worried that your doctor will no longer be in your Advantage plan network next year and the last thing you want to do is lose him or her in the middle of a health problem. You can ask your physician which plans they will be participating in next year. And if it turns out they will no longer be in network, you can likely switch to an Advantage plan they will accept, according to Hoadley.

One thing to keep in mind: About half of Advantage plans are HMO (health maintenance organization) plans that, while low-cost (premiums can be as low as $0), typically won't cover out-of-network doctors. So it may be best to choose a pricier PPO (preferred provider organization), Hoadley says. Although the monthly premium is about 30 percent more, PPO plans may cover up to half the cost of out-of-network care—a much better deal if the need arises.

What happens if you have to start taking costly drugs?

There's really great news here: In 2025, no one will pay more than $2,000 out of pocket for covered prescription medications no matter which type of Medicare they're on.

When to Consider Medicaid and How to Qualify

You may hope to stay in your home for the rest of your life. But circumstances might mean you need more substantial healthcare than your family or hired caregivers can provide. When you consider that a private room in a nursing home can cost upward of $116,000 per year and is not covered by original Medicare or Medicare Advantage, you may need to turn to your state's Medicaid program.

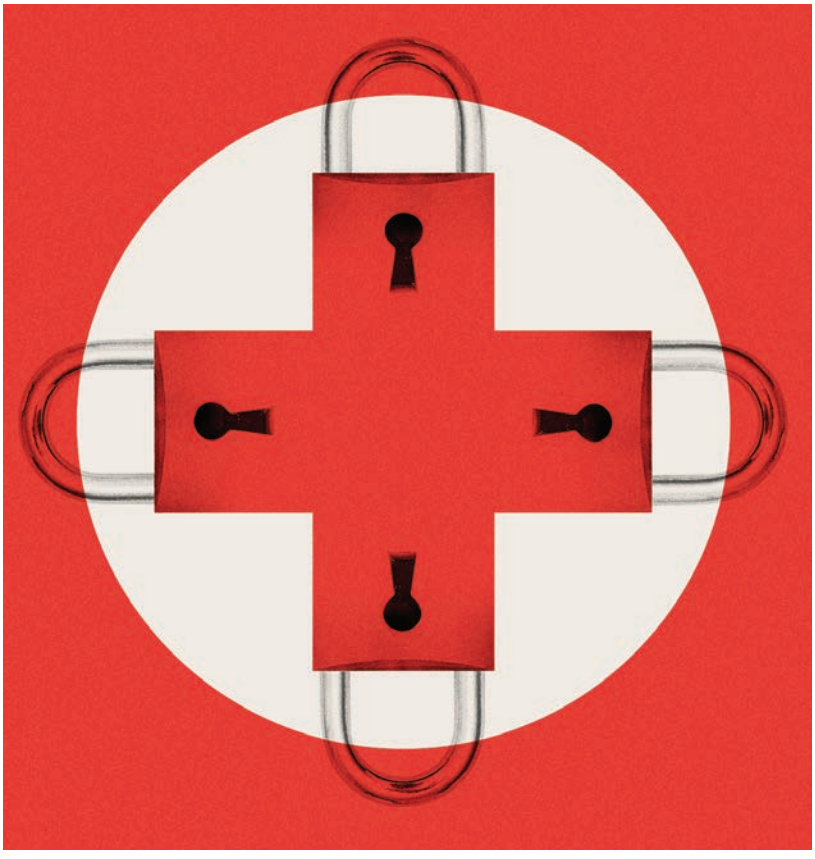
To qualify, you'll have to show that you have limited assets—the amount varies by state. For 2024 in New York, for example, an individual seeking nursing-home care must earn less than $1,732 a month and have no more than $31,175 in assets, not including their home, car, and wedding rings, according to the American Council on Aging.

One way to prepare to meet those limits is to set up a Medicaid Asset Protection Trust, a type of irrevocable trust. You place assets like your home, stocks and bonds, and certificates of deposit into the trust—a legal arrangement where someone you appoint holds those assets on your behalf. In this way, you no longer own the assets—the trust does.

In addition to helping you qualify for Medicaid, the arrangement also prevents creditors from going after these assets. A few things that usually don't go into the trust: your Social Security benefits, IRA, 401(k), and pension. Additional beneficiaries, such as your spouse or children, can be named when you form the trust.

Still, a plan's list of covered drugs, called a formulary, can change from year to year. This means that if you want to keep your costs well below $2,000, a plan that worked well for you in the past might not continue to be the best value. Be aware: The out-of-pocket limit doesn't apply to drugs the plan doesn't cover at all.

Consider switching drug plans if your meds are no longer listed in your current plan's formulary, or were moved to what's called tier 4 or 5 (these have the highest out-of-pocket costs), says Frederic Riccardi at Medicare Rights. To find out, go to Medicare.gov, click on "Find health and drug plans," and type in your drugs and their dosage to compare your current plan with new ones in your ZIP code.



PROTECT YOUR ASSETS FROM BIG BILLS

Perhaps you had a bad bout of food poisoning that landed you in the hospital for a few days. Or you had a heart attack, which required time in a rehab center. Even with the best coverage, a serious illness can leave you on the hook for more money than you can afford. Our advice: Don't pay any medical bill until you've confirmed that it's accurate and you've explored options to mitigate its cost (see "Hit With a Big Medical Bill? Do This," on the facing page). Here are ways to find those funds.

Tap your life insurance.

If you have a permanent life insurance policy (whole or universal) it may have an "accelerated death benefit" rider that allows you to withdraw 25 to 100 percent of the policy's value if you have a chronic condition, need to be admitted to a long-term-care facility, or have received a terminal illness diagnosis.

If that's not an option, you could sell your policy—what's known as a "viatical settlement." While not usually a great choice for people who wish to leave funds to family members, the lump sum it provides can help offset medical costs, says Melissa Cox, an independent certified financial planner in Dallas who specializes in retirement

Before paying any medical bill, confirm that it's accurate and explore options to help trim its cost.

planning. Contact your insurance company to start the process.

Another idea: You might be able to take out a loan on the policy if it has accrued enough value. The only risk here: If you can't pay it back, there will be less of a payout to your beneficiaries when you die.

Take out a home equity loan.

Compared with personal loans, which can start at 11 percent interest, home equity loans start at around 7 percent and may be tax-deductible.

Another option is to borrow against your home with a reverse mortgage, Cox says. These loans pay you a lump sum or a monthly amount based on the home's value and your age. They also charge monthly fees and interest.

These are tricky loans, so if you decide to go this route, make sure you fully understand the terms. Also, add your spouse or live-in partner as a co-borrower. Then, in the event of your death, they can remain in the home and continue to receive money from the loan.

Apply for financial assistance.

Nonprofit hospitals are required to offer some portion of their services as "charitable care," and you do not always have to be low-income to qualify for it, says Lisa Berry Blackstock, founder of Soul Sherpa, a medical billing and estate planning company. Be sure to ask about this option because hospitals won't always let you know it's available. Another way to find out whether a hospital has charitable care you qualify for is to check at Dollar For (dollarfor.org), a nonprofit that tracks thousands of charitable care programs and offers free help applying.

Hit With a Big Medical Bill? Do This.

When a bill gives you sticker shock, these tried-and-true tactics could help lower it—or even make it go away.

▸ **MAKE SURE THE BILL IS LEGIT—AND THAT YOU'RE REQUIRED TO PAY IT.** Doctors' offices and hospitals sometimes send the invoice for your care to you before they submit it to your insurance, says Linda Michelson, founder of the Medical Billing Advocate, a service that helps individuals negotiate high healthcare costs. If you get a bill from your provider, first confirm that the bill has been properly submitted to your insurer. After it is, you'll receive an explanation of benefits from your Medicare plan showing what it covered and how much you owe.

▸ **LOOK FOR INCORRECT CHARGES.** Here's a stunning number: Nearly half of all medical bills contain errors, according to the Patient Advocate Foundation, an advocacy group that helps people negotiate big bills. Make sure your provider gives you a line-by-line itemized invoice, and be on the lookout for duplicate charges, bills that should have been covered (but weren't), and charges for services you didn't actually receive. Report errors to the provider, and ask that a revised bill be submitted to your insurer, Michelson says.

▸ **GET HELP TO NEGOTIATE THE BILL DOWN.** Consider hiring a patient advocate to do this on your behalf. This pro can comb through the charges on your bills to determine which ones are reasonable and customary—and which aren't—and then work with the provider to lower or eliminate them. "Most patients hire me once they owe $5,000 or more," says Lisa Berry Blackstock, founder of Soul Sherpa, a medical billing and estate planning company. Either alone or with an advocate, you can also file an appeal with Medicare if you think the treatment or service should be covered but wasn't.

You can find a medical billing specialist through the Alliance of Professional Health Advocates (aphadvocates.org). Check to make sure that the specialist you find is credentialed by the Patient Advocate Certification Board.

▸ **WHILE YOU DISPUTE THE BILL,** ask to have the collections process put on hold. Bills typically need to be paid within 30 days, but the clock can be temporarily stopped until the dispute process is finalized. So phone the accounting or collections department of the hospital or medical facility, Michelson says.

▸ **CONTACTED BY A DEBT COLLECTOR?** Don't pay right away. Instead, ask for verification of the debt, which they must send within seven days, in writing, along with the original bill, to confirm that it's correct. If it isn't, contact the collection agency both by certified mail and by phone to alert them that you're disputing it. They must cease collections for 30 days so you can gather evidence that you or your insurer already paid the bill, that you're not the debtor but are being billed due to an identity mix-up, or that the debt is no longer able to be collected. In some states, unpaid debt of any kind, including medical, is no longer eligible for collections after a set period of time. In New York, for example, it's illegal to try to collect a debt older than three years.

HOW TO Book Travel LIKE A PRO

Doing your own vacation planning doesn't have to be complicated. Here, insider strategies for finding the best, cheapest flights, hotels, cruises, and rental cars.

BY LISA L. GILL

It all seems so easy. To go somewhere wonderful, you just have to open your laptop and start booking flights, hotels, and rental cars. Who needs a travel agent, anyway?

But then the dizzying number of choices you'll need to make stops you in your tracks. Which booking sites should you use? Which airline? Should you reserve that cruise directly? And does it make sense to prepay for hotel rooms and rental cars, or should you wait until later?

Such decisions matter, and not just because you're looking to save. You also want to feel confident that you're getting the best experience you can for your money.

To help with that, we interviewed top travel experts and made dozens of "test" bookings ourselves to check on pricing. The result? A step-by-step guide that will help you plan a great vacation, with plenty of tips for scoring upgrades, discounts, and perks. (We'll also tell you when using a travel agent is the best way to go.)

Clockwise from top left: San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge; Muir Woods National Monument, Marin County, Calif.; and Cobh Harbour, County Cork, Ireland

DO IT YOURSELF OR HIRE A TRAVEL AGENT?

Hiring a travel pro is worthwhile for expensive trips ($5,000 and up, say) involving complex itineraries or big groups. Agents can handle logistics like airport transfers and snag hard-to-get reservations, says Rebecca Alesia, owner of Wanderology travel agency in New York. And when problems arise (canceled flights, etc.), they'll jump in to help so you don't waste vacation time on hold with customer service. The cost? Fees start around $250 per trip; others are paid by hotels or tour operators. Ask for a price quote before deciding to work with one.

Flights

How to search: Starting two to three months before departure for domestic flights, or three to six months for international, use Google Flights, Kayak, or Skyskanner to get a general sense of prices and flight times for your destination. (All are aggregators that pull results from the major airlines.) For last-minute flights, try CheapOair.

Get flexible: To find the lowest possible price, click on Kayak's calendar feature or Google Flights' "date grid" to see which dates have the lowest fares–and consider changing your plan if, say, it's cheaper to fly on Saturday than on Sunday. Consider nearby alternate airports, too–instead of Los Angeles International Airport, it might cost less to fly to Long Beach Airport, for example.

Booking two one-way tickets instead of a round-trip, or flying different airlines for different legs of your journey, can also save you money, says Jesse Neugarten, CEO of Dollar Flight Club, a discount travel organization.

Pounce now—or wait? Kayak uses historical data to forecast whether prices are likely to go up or down over the coming days. (Look for "Our advice.") If prices may be heading down, you can set up an alert to email you if they do. (Several booking sites do this; look for "track prices" on Kayak.)

Book with confidence: Once you've settled on particular flights, head to the winning airline's website to book. The reason? If your flight is canceled or changed, getting it rebooked or refunded tends to be slower and more difficult with a third-party website such as Expedia or Kayak, says Chuck Bell, CR policy advocate.

And what about choosing a fare class? Sure, those basic fares can run 20 percent less than the next fare class up. But beware: On many airlines, the cheapest ticket category now means no carry-on bag, no seat choice, and no sitting with your travel companions. And if you start adding optional upgrades for luggage or seat selection, that basic ticket can end up costing as much as a standard main cabin ticket or more.

Finally, if you find a better deal

BEST & WORST U.S. AIRLINES

17,000-plus CR members rated airlines on service, check-in ease, pricing transparency, and more.

COACH/ ECONOMY CLASS	OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE
Hawaiian Airlines	81
Alaska Airlines	71
Breeze Airways	70
Delta Air Lines	69
Southwest Airlines	65
Avelo Airlines	64
JetBlue Airways	61
Allegiant Airlines	58
United Airlines	58
American Airlines	53
Sun Country Airlines	51
Spirit Airlines	36
Frontier Airlines	29

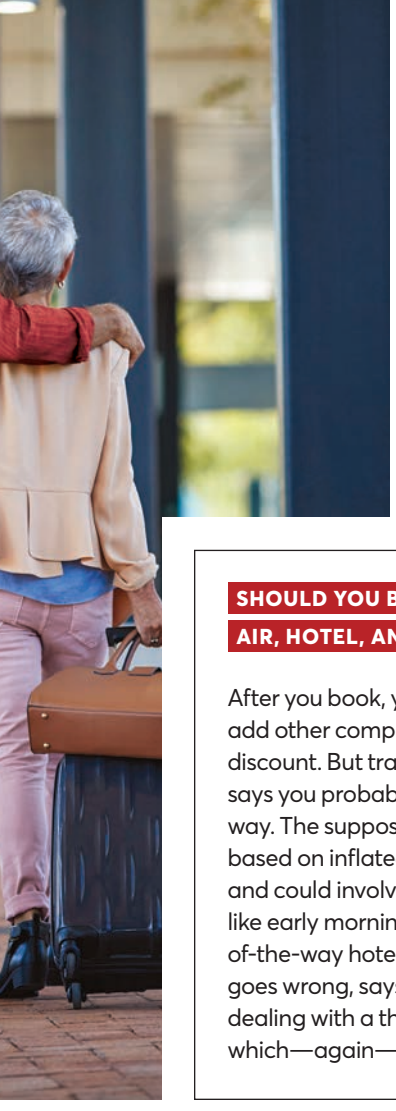
BUSINESS/ FIRST CLASS	
Hawaiian Airlines	98
Alaska Airlines	84
Delta Air Lines	80
United Airlines	73
Southwest Airlines	69
American Airlines	69
JetBlue Airways	69

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES (6)

Get a Perk!

Celebrating a birthday or an anniversary? Mention it to an agent at the desk or a flight attendant as you board—it might get you free champagne or even an upgrade. That's how travel pro Jesse Neugarten and his wife flew first class to Hawaii on their honeymoon.

WORSE BETTER



SHOULD YOU BUNDLE AIR, HOTEL, AND CAR?

After you book, you may get offers to add other components of your trip at a discount. But travel expert Bill McGee says you probably shouldn't bundle that way. The supposed savings are usually based on inflated "rack rates," he says, and could involve undesirable options like early morning departures and out-of-the-way hotels. And if something goes wrong, says CR's Bell, you'll be stuck dealing with a third-party booking site, which—again—can be a headache.

or just change your mind, federal rules say you can cancel a flight within 24 hours and get a full refund if you bought the ticket at least seven days before the scheduled departure.

➔ **Get help:** If walking long airport concourses is a challenge because of a disability, airlines will provide free wheelchair service. (Click "special travel needs" when you book.) Two companies, Global Airport Concierge and Royal Airport Concierge, also offer meet-and-greet services at major U.S. and international airports. For around $450, depending on the airport and the size of your party, a Royal Airport Concierge agent will meet you curbside, check your bags, get your boarding passes, escort you through security (and into an airline lounge, if available), and take you to your gate.

➔ **Insider tip:** Got a layover of more than a couple of hours? Check your credit card's perks: American Express Platinum cardholders, for example, have free lounge access in about 500 airports worldwide. And many airlines sell day passes to their lounges: American for $79, for example, and United for $59.

Hotels

➔ **How to search:** Starting at least two weeks out, search by city and date at Booking.com, Google Travel (google.com/travel), or Kayak to find lodgings, availability, and prices. (For boutique hotels, try TabletHotels.) How to narrow the options? The ratings and customer reviews on Tripadvisor are a good place to start. The Condé Nast Traveler and Travel + Leisure websites

Get a Perk!

➔ **Hotel front-desk staff** can often grant late checkouts, give out free breakfast vouchers, or upgrade you to a room with a view—so ask. Keep in mind that such favors are more likely if you made your reservation directly, not through a third-party booking website.

are useful sources if you're looking for a fun new boutique hotel or an off-the-beaten-path gem. If you're putting together a dream trip, SmartFlyer or Virtuoso can point you to travel agents who specialize in certain regions or types of trips.

Two warnings: Don't be dazzled by supposed discounts off the published room rates. "No one pays those list prices," says Bill McGee, senior fellow for aviation and travel at the American Economic Liberties Project. And don't fall for "50 people booked in the last hour" or "Only 1 room left at this price!" pressure tactics. The latter may be true of the site's designated block of rooms, but the hotel itself might still have plenty of rooms available.

➔ **Book with confidence:** Once you find a hotel you like at a great price, check its website, where you can often find exclusive discounts if you reserve directly. Don't see any deals? Call the hotel and ask whether it's offering any. Some will give you discounts or free nights if you stay for three or more nights. And remember that many major hotels accept AAA and AARP discount codes and may offer military, teacher, and senior discounts. Another benefit of direct booking: Hotel staff are more likely to provide upgrades and perks.

➔ **Insider tip:** Many luxury hotels offer free amenities that aren't widely promoted and thus get overlooked—but can save you money or make your stay special. Some, for example, will offer local rides in hotel cars, saving the cost of a rental car or an Uber ride. And many hotel spas let you use the steam room and sauna without requiring you to book a pricey treatment.

Cruises

➔ **How to search:** The best cruises require advance planning, so start your search at least six (and ideally 12) months before you hope to set sail. To narrow the options, go to cruisecritic.com, where you can sort cruises from the major lines by popularity and consumer ratings, as well as region, days at sea, and price.

Once you're focused on a half-dozen or so, use the cruise line websites to dig deeper into the dates, itineraries, prices, and details about onboard activities, amenities and on-shore excursions. Then pop your dates into the booking page and select a cabin type to see a price, including taxes, fees, and upgrades—but stop before entering your payment details.

➔ **This is important:** The prices you'll see generally won't include a lot of additional costs, such as alcoholic drinks, excursion fees, gratuities, transportation, and hotels before and after the cruise. For a ballpark idea of your final cost, Don Bucolo of Eat Sleep Cruise, a cruise news and tips website, suggests doubling the advertised price—and says the extra expenses could be even greater for cruises lasting longer than a week.

➔ **Book with confidence:** When you're ready to book, use an independent cruise specialist, Bucolo recommends. These travel pros can often get you valuable onboard credits or free WiFi packages that could save you upward of $45 per person per day.

A good way to find an independent agent is through Avoya Travel or CruiseCompete.com. These sites submit your desired itinerary to cruise agents, who then send you quotes, including any perks they can offer. When we sought quotes for a six-night western Caribbean cruise on Princess Cruises' Regal Princess ship in February 2025, one agent's offer beat the cruise line's price by $80 and threw in onboard credits and perks worth $150. Another agent got it for almost $660 less.

➔ **Insider tips:** Cruise lines advertise per-person prices but assume two people will share a room. Solo travelers will usually have to pay twice the per-person "double occupancy" price for a room—but not on Holland or Norwegian, which on certain ships offer single rooms for less than what you'd pay for a voyage in a cabin meant for two. And solo cabins on Virgin do not incur a single supplement, which can translate into savings of up to 50 percent.

Also, if you need to fly into your departure port, plan to arrive at least a day early in case your flight is delayed. Certain cruise lines offer discounted flights and hotel rooms, and a booking agent can help arrange those.

➔ **Need special assistance?** The industry's newer ships are generally the most accommodating to travelers who use wheelchairs, scooters, or walkers. Royal Caribbean's Symphony of the Seas, for example, has 46 accessible cabins, lifts in pools and hot tubs, special seating in dining rooms and theaters, and automated doorways and ramps. (Learn more at specialneedsatsea.com.)

PHOTO: DAVID CLEMENT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Get a Perk!

➔ **Some folks prefer a room in a specific location** on a cruise ship—near the dining room or pool, for example. But if you don't mind rolling the dice, consider booking a "guaranteed" cabin within your selected cabin class rather than selecting a specific

WHAT IF YOU GET SICK ON YOUR CRUISE?

Cruise ships have doctors and medical facilities that can treat common illnesses and injuries and dispense common medications. Appointment fees typically need to be paid for on site. (Your insurer may reimburse part of the fee if you submit the invoice when you get home.) Bucolo suggests getting travel insurance in case of more serious health issues. If you show symptoms of or test positive for COVID-19, he says, "you're likely to be quarantined in your room or another cabin."

room. The price will be the lower, and the cruise line will assign you a room that's at least as good, but it leaves open the possibility of getting a better cabin type or location if your original cabin tier is sold out, says Don Bucolo of cruise website Eat Sleep Cruise.

Car Rentals

How to search: A quick search on Booking.com, Expedia, or Kayak will give you a sense of what's available at your desired pickup location and at what price. Start searching a month before your trip and check your reservation again two weeks out and again right before the trip. For last-minute deals, try car rental agency websites or independent sites such as AutoSlash and Priceline.

Book with confidence: Once you settle on an itinerary, book your car at the rental company's website—again, to avoid the inconvenience of dealing with a third-party travel website if problems arise or you need to change your plans. Make sure to use any discount codes you have access to through AAA, AARP, or military affiliations, which can cut your cost by 20 to 35 percent—enough to effectively offset some of those mandatory fees and taxes that add to your total rental cost, says CR's Chuck Bell. And consider specifying "gas only" to make sure you don't unintentionally end up with an all-electric vehicle, which can sometimes be cheaper to rent on a per-day basis but can be a problem if you are staying somewhere without charging hookups or are driving long distances without easy charger access.

Insider tip: While you can often get a hefty discount if you pay up front online, don't do it. You may end up finding a better deal closer to your travel date. To that end, after making your reservation, head over to autoslash.com and enter your reservation request plus any available discount codes. The site will scan the web looking for better deals and email you a list of offers.

Also, note that you may be able to save money by picking up your car at a nearby rental car facility rather than at the airport. Just be sure the cost of getting there (and back) won't eat up all the savings.

BEST & WORST RENTAL CAR COMPANIES

6,000-plus CR members rated them on customer service, value, condition of the cars, ease of pickup, pricing transparency, ease of booking, and more.

	OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE
National Car Rental	93
Enterprise	75
Alamo	72
Hertz	63
Sixt	59
Avis	54
Budget	46
Dollar	39
Fox	31
Thrifty	26

Get a Perk!

Loyalty program members can often bypass the line at the rental counter and go right to their car. Some programs let you take any car in the lot you want.

DOES PERSONAL INSURANCE COVER YOU IN A RENTAL CAR?

Not necessarily. Personal auto policies and credit card coverage have major limitations for rentals, including the kind of vehicles they cover, for how long, and in what countries. Personal auto policies do not typically pay daily "loss of use" fees charged while a damaged rental is being fixed. And credit cards don't offer liability protection. So check your policies before declining coverage.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

WORSE — BETTER

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Should I be using Top Tier gas?

Yes. Top Tier gas—which contains extra detergent additives for cleanliness and better engine performance—is not sold at all gas stations. But based on AAA tests, CR recommends that you use it. To determine whether the gas stations you frequent sell it, look for a sticker on the pump with the Top Tier Approved Gasoline logo. You can find Top Tier gas at 76, Chevron, Citgo, Costco, Mobil, Phillips 66, Shell, Sunoco, Texaco, and Valero gas stations, among others. Learn more at: **CR.org/toptiergas**.

TOP TIER™ Approved Gasoline

INSURANCE MATTERS

My car is totaled. Now what?

If repair costs exceed your car's value, your insurer will consider it **a total loss** even if the damage is cosmetic and the car is still drivable. The lower your car's value, the more likely it is to be totaled. But you have options. You can accept the claim payout and buy a new car or you can take it and keep your car with a **salvage title** (which may make it harder to sell later). "If the car can be safely driven, it may make sense to keep it," says Rosemary Shahan, president of Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

60%

Percentage of new cars that don't come with a spare tire. Instead, many are equipped with a sealant kit to temporarily fix a flat. The lack of a spare may be due to regulatory pressure to make cars lighter—which means better fuel economy for them.

Source: CR's Auto Test Center, based on tested cars bought since 2020.

RECALL

BMW

More than 105,000 BMWs—including certain X5 and X7 (2019-2020), 3 Series and X6 (2020), 7 Series (2020-2021), 8 Series (2020), and 8 Series Gran Coupe (2020) vehicles—are being recalled due to concerns about a defect in the starter motor that can cause an electrical overload, which can result in motor failure or a potential fire.

WHAT TO DO Dealerships will update software to prevent the electrical overload problem at no charge. For more information, call BMW at 800-525-7417.

Honda Prologue

The Prologue EV is based on General Motors' Ultium electric vehicle architecture, which is also used in the similar Chevrolet Blazer EV.

CR'S TAKE The Prologue AWD accelerates quickly from a stop and is quiet and roomy inside. It can charge speedily on a home charger and has an EPA-estimated range of 281 miles. But handling isn't agile and the ride is stiff. On top of that, the wide roof pillars limit visibility, the flat front seats offer little support, and the GM-sourced cabin materials feel less substantial than those we see in most Hondas.

BASE PRICE RANGE $47,400-$57,900
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,395
PRICE AS DRIVEN $56,550

PHOTO: HONDA

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

GET **A GREAT DEAL** ON YOUR NEXT **NEW CAR**

Our expert advice will help you find the right choice for you at the best possible price.

BY KEITH BARRY • ILLUSTRATIONS BY GIORDANO POLONI

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CR's AUTO RATINGS
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With the average sale price of a new car close to $48,000, according to Kelley Blue Book, finding a vehicle you'll love without paying too much for it may seem pretty difficult.

But thanks to websites that let buyers compare prices online, dealerships have an incentive to price cars competitively. Instead of haggling with a salesperson at a dealership, you can negotiate by phone and email, or use services like CR's Build & Buy to get reasonable quotes.

Some cars, of course, aren't worth buying no matter how much they've been discounted. What also makes the buying process challenging: Many dealers add "junk fees," often labeled as "market adjustments," or they push add-ons with inflated prices, such as extended warranties and pricey floor mats.

That's where we come in. CR has purchased thousands of cars for our auto test program, so we know our way around the car-buying process, and we've also learned industry secrets from current and former dealership managers and salespeople.

Now, we're sharing our expertise and equipping you with the tools you'll need to get a great price on your next new vehicle. We'll help you find the right price for the right car, and we'll provide some useful tips for negotiating a great deal.

▼ STEP 1

Finding the Right Car

Chances are you've seen ads that promise thousands of dollars off the price of a particular new car. But before you get excited about the savings, remember that unreliable or poor-performing vehicles often get the biggest price cuts at dealerships because they aren't selling quickly. "There's no such thing as a good deal on a bad car," says Jake Fisher, senior director of CR's Auto Test Center. "No amount of savings will make up for high repair costs, frequent trips to the dealership, and low resale value."

For example, you might be able to buy the Volkswagen Tiguan shown on the facing page for a big discount, but its lower resale value and higher repair costs could actually make it more expensive in the long run than the higher-priced Honda CR-V.

That's why it's a good idea to start your search for a new car by checking CR's road-test results, along with reliability and owner satisfaction ratings, beginning on page 85. On those pages, you'll learn which of the 257 new cars, pickup trucks, SUVs, and minivans we've tested are the most dependable and satisfying to own and drive.

Buying a reliable model also pays off when you're ready to sell it or trade it in. "In general, reliable cars tend to have higher resale values because owners know they'll continue to get a trouble-free experience without pricey repairs," Fisher says. Vehicles with better owner satisfaction scores also tend to be in high demand as used cars.

To get an idea of how much your brand-new car might be worth in four years, look up what a 4-year-old version is worth according to CR's Car Value Estimator, available at **CR.org/carvalue**.

▼ STEP 2

Researching Prices

You may already be aware that the price on a vehicle's window sticker (or the one in a car ad) isn't necessarily the final price you'll pay, says Gabe Shenhar, associate director at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center, who has purchased hundreds of the cars CR has tested (all of them anonymously so that dealerships don't know it's CR doing the buying).

"Dealers are independent of the brand they're selling, and so they can charge more (or less) than what the manufacturer suggests," he says, explaining that automakers often give dealerships bonuses if they sell lots of cars or sell specific models. "That allows the dealer to pass on the discount to the consumer if the consumer negotiates well," Shenhar says.

When negotiating, there's more than one price you have to pay attention to:

MSRP The manufacturer's suggested retail price is the amount a car manufacturer determines a vehicle should sell for, and it's often used in advertisements and displayed on a

WHICH CAR SHOULD YOU BUY?

A great deal isn't just about the up-front price. You also need to consider how much a car costs to own and how much you'll get when it's time to trade it in or sell it. When we compared the average transaction prices, predicted reliability ratings, and projected resale value over four years for two popular pairs of similarly equipped SUVs from the 2024 model year, we found that getting a discount on an unreliable car or a vehicle with poor resale value isn't going to save you money in the long run.

COMPACT SUV

Dubious Discount Even though the CR-V sells for over MSRP on average, it's still the better deal because the Tiguan's discount can't make up for its lower predicted resale value or potential reliability issues.

VOLKSWAGEN
TIGUAN 4MOTION SE

MSRP $33,080

63 OVERALL SCORE | PREDICTED RELIABILITY

$32,308	-	$16,750	=	$15,558
AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		PROJECTED TRADE-IN VALUE IN FOUR YEARS		COST TO OWN

HONDA
CR-V EX AWD

MSRP $33,510

85 OVERALL SCORE | PREDICTED RELIABILITY

$33,810	-	$21,285	=	BEST VALUE $12,525
AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		PROJECTED TRADE-IN VALUE IN FOUR YEARS		COST TO OWN

LUXURY SUV

Slippery Savings Discounts might make the Alfa Romeo more appealing initially, but once you factor in reliability and resale value, the higher-priced BMW turns out to be a better deal in the long run.

ALFA ROMEO
STELVIO SPRINT AWD

MSRP $47,950

57 OVERALL SCORE | PREDICTED RELIABILITY

$44,574	-	$15,305	=	$29,269
AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		PROJECTED TRADE-IN VALUE IN FOUR YEARS		COST TO OWN

BMW
X3 xDRIVE30i

MSRP $48,900

86 OVERALL SCORE | PREDICTED RELIABILITY

$47,028	-	$20,910	=	BEST VALUE $26,118
AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		PROJECTED TRADE-IN VALUE IN FOUR YEARS		COST TO OWN

vehicle's window sticker. You can use this price to determine whether a car will fit your budget.

TRANSACTION PRICE Including incentives and haggling, this is the amount a dealership actually charges you for a vehicle before taxes and fees. This amount could be more or less than the MSRP, depending on how much demand there is for a vehicle.

OUT-THE-DOOR PRICE This is the amount you would write a check for, or the total amount your bank would finance, including taxes, fees, and extras.

The fees shown in the out-the-door price may include a:

Destination fee. This is a non-negotiable charge for transporting the vehicle from the factory to the dealership.

Documentation fee. Sometimes called a conveyance fee, this is the fee a dealership charges to cover the cost of processing documents related to a vehicle sale. Some states cap the amount that dealers can charge. We've seen fees as low as $70 in California and as high as $900 in Florida. Many dealerships will not negotiate a documentation fee, but Shenhar says you can always ask the salesperson to reduce the price of the car itself accordingly, because salespeople have more flexibility there.

The best way to avoid paying more than someone else is to research prices by using services such as CR's own Build & Buy program (**CR.org/buildandbuy**). It is powered by data from TrueCar, which tracks real transaction prices from over 12,000 dealerships across the country. Build & Buy will tell you what other buyers in your area have paid for similar vehicles, and what prices are considered a good or bad deal. It will also connect you with dealerships to get up-front price offers. (Edmunds offers a similar service, and CarGurus analyzes the prices of used cars.)

"Only by knowing the typical transaction price can you know if you are getting a good deal and how aggressively to negotiate for a discount," says Todd Young, senior data analytics specialist at CR.

For example, if you're shopping for a 2024 Chevrolet Traverse LT AWD in Kansas City, Mo., you might think you got a good deal if you paid $43,185, which is less than the car's $43,395 MSRP. But according to CR's Build & Buy, you actually got a bad deal, because some local buyers

WHY LAST YEAR'S MODEL COULD SAVE YOU THOUSANDS

Buying a "leftover" model could cut your costs—and sometimes get you a better car, too.

You might have heard a dealership advertise discounts on leftovers in order to make room for newer models. Buying last year's model can be a way to pay less for what is essentially the same car as this year's version.

Our analysis of TrueCar price data showed that discounts were rare on 2025 model year vehicles when they first started appearing at dealerships in the summer of 2024. At the same time, discounts on some 2024 models were over $2,000.

Despite those savings, there are some pitfalls to watch out for when choosing between a new model and a leftover car.

First, cross-check which features are on the new model and on the leftover you plan to buy, because availability changes from year to year. For example, the 2024 Hyundai Palisade SEL AWD (on the facing page) had standard auto-dimming side mirrors across all trims, but they were dropped from the SEL trim for 2025. That makes this leftover model better-equipped than a new one, but that is a rare occurrence.

If you're financing a car, automakers may offer different promotional interest rates depending on model year. The savings could add up to thousands of dollars over the life of a loan, so be sure to factor them into your decision.

It might be smart to buy last year's model if the newer one got a major update. "Years of assessing reliability has shown us that the first years of a new model usually have the most problems, and those issues tend to get sorted out in subsequent years," says CR's Jake Fisher.

Finally, remember that buying a leftover model means you're already a year behind on depreciation when it comes time to sell or trade in the vehicle.

negotiated the price down to $40,659.

Once you have Build & Buy's pricing data, email or call a dealership and ask for its best price on the car you want. If the price is too high, start negotiating for the lower price you know other buyers have already gotten on the same vehicle. Alternatively, Build & Buy will put local dealerships in touch with you to offer prices for the vehicle you want.

We recommend creating a separate, free email account for this purpose—based on our experience, you'll get a lot of emails from dealerships that want your business.

It's important to have realistic expectations. CR's analysis of TrueCar data shows that, for vehicles that sell below MSRP, discounts usually range from a few hundred dollars to a couple of thousand less than MSRP—so don't expect to talk a dealer into $3,000 off a popular new model. Instead, look for vehicles that are already priced close to what Build & Buy says is a good deal.

Our analysis of pricing data uncovered a few more tips to keep in mind:

- The less expensive a car is, the less you should expect to save off MSRP. Profit margins are too small for dealers to discount much on cars priced around $25,000 or below.
- Big savings are often available on luxury vehicles—including cars, trucks, and SUVs—which have wider profit margins than less-expensive cars. A few may sell for more than $5,000 below MSRP.
- We saw huge discounts—between $5,000 and $10,000—on luxury electric vehicles from European automakers. Be aware that EVs tend to have higher depreciation than gas or hybrid cars, so those up-front savings might cost you more in the long run when it's time to sell or trade in the vehicle. You won't be able to negotiate discounts on vehicles from EV brands such as Tesla, Lucid, and Rivian, which are sold directly to consumers, but they do occasionally drop (and raise) prices.
- Popular models with a lot of hype surrounding them rarely sell at a discount. For example, our pricing data shows that the Ford Maverick—a unique, compact hybrid pickup truck—can sell for up to $1,800 above MSRP.

"For some cars, paying $1,000 over sticker price is actually a great deal because it can be a lot less than most other customers have paid for that car," Young says.

2024 **HYUNDAI** PALISADE SEL AWD

There are no big updates for 2025, so a leftover model is a good bet.

$43,613	-	$41,169	=	BEST VALUE $2,444
2025 MODEL AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		2024 MODEL AVERAGE TRANSACTION PRICE		SAVINGS ON A 2024 MODEL COMPARED WITH A 2025

STEP 3

Negotiating With the Dealership

Every car transaction includes some legitimate charges beyond the MSRP, such as destination, registration, and title fees, as well as taxes. But some dealers will advertise an artificially low price to get shoppers in the door, only to add a "dealer markup" fee or add on costly extras with artificially inflated prices. These are merely ways for dealers to increase their profit margins, so feel free to push back when negotiating, says Shenhar.

In 2022, the Federal Trade Commission proposed new regulations that prevent dealerships from using these kinds of sales tactics. Known as the Combatting Auto Retail Scams (CARS) Rule, as of press time it's being held up by a legal challenge from dealership trade groups.

Until the challenge is resolved, the best way to protect yourself from an expensive surprise is to ask the salesperson for an itemized out-the-door price in writing as soon as you agree on a transaction price. It should show every tax, fee, and extra charge in writing, including every discount you qualify for. If an out-the-door price adds up to a bad deal, walk away and go to a dealer that doesn't engage in these tactics.

Believe it or not, dealers still try to layer on fees even after you've agreed on an out-the-door price. You'll often be led to the finance and insurance office, also known as "F and I." You may be told you're there to sign some paperwork and transfer your car insurance. But it's also an opportunity for the dealership to upsell you on extras, including prepaid maintenance plans, extended warranties, anti-theft features, and insurance programs that pay to repair damaged wheels, scratched paint, or torn upholstery. Some dealerships tried to charge us high prices for accessories like upgraded floor mats and wheel locks, even though we could find them at lower prices online.

All of these extras are optional, so walk away from any dealership that tells you they aren't. In general, we think it's wise to decline extended warranties on new vehicles. "Spend your money on a vehicle that scores well in CR's reliability ratings, as it's less likely to need pricey repairs in the first place," says Fisher. If you do want extra protection, know that prices on warranties and protection plans are negotiable, and that most dealers will let you buy them after you purchase the car.

If you're trading in a car, negotiate the price of your new car first, because the dealer might try to give you a low offer on your trade to make up for a great deal on a new car. We recommend getting free estimates from third-party car buyers–such as CarMax, Carvana, local dealerships, and CR's Build & Buy–which takes minutes and can be done without leaving home. If you're not happy with the dealership's trade-in offer, sell your car where you got the best offer.

If you're financing a vehicle, get preapproved for a loan from a bank or credit union before you head to the dealership. Automakers often advertise a low promotional interest rate on a new car loan–if they can beat the interest rate you walked in with, take it.

SECRETS TO BIG SAVINGS

Determine a Reasonable Interest Rate
Check the automaker's website for promotional interest rates. Sites like Bankrate, LendingTree, and NerdWallet will tell you what rates banks and credit unions are offering.

Know What Your Trade-In Is Worth
Get an offer from CR's Build & Buy, CarMax, Carvana, or a local dealer. Trade in your car only if the dealer will offer more.

Target Your Transaction Price
Using CR's Build & Buy service, find out what others in your area are paying for the same vehicle and use that information to negotiate a good price.

Get an Out-the-Door Price in Writing
Either over email or in person, make sure the dealer shows you an itemized out-the-door price so you're not surprised by hidden fees.

Decline Add-Ons or Ask for Discounts
Be prepared to get the hard sell when you go to the finance office. Be ready to say "no" to the extras you don't want.

SCAN TO USE CR's FREE BUILD & BUY SERVICE.

CR's NEW CAR RATINGS

Even if you're offered a great deal on a new vehicle, you still need to make sure it's the right one for you. CR's auto experts scrutinize every car, SUV, truck, and van like nobody else, giving you the information you need to make a smart buy.

The ratings in this guide will help you narrow your choices before you start shopping. We've organized the cars by vehicle category, ranked them by Overall Score within each category so that you can easily find the top models, indicated the price in their as-tested configuration, and highlighted the strengths and weaknesses. We also share tips from CR experts on how to get a great deal for each vehicle type.

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WHY SOME MODELS DON'T APPEAR IN THE RATINGS

Models missing from our ratings are in the midst of being tested or we're waiting to purchase them. The following will be in road tests in future issues and on CR.org: the Acura ZDX; Buick Enclave; Chevrolet Equinox EV and Traverse; Fiat 500e; Ford Ranger; GMC Acadia; Honda Prologue; Hyundai Ioniq 5 N; Kia K4 and K5; Lexus GX; Mini Cooper and Countryman; Nissan Kicks; Ram 1500; Subaru Forester; Tesla Cybertruck; Toyota 4Runner, Camry, and Land Cruiser; and Volvo EX90.

Sedans & Hatchbacks

Sales incentives for these cars are usually offered throughout the year, but popular models tend to have much smaller discounts.

Subcompacts
$16,000 to $26,000
PROS: They're maneuverable in urban settings and easy to park; hatchbacks offer generous cargo area.
CONS: They can be noisy and slow to accelerate. Interiors are often spartan, and the rear seats are pretty snug for adults. Most active safety systems in models in this category are optional.

Compacts
$24,000 to $36,000
PROS: These are often available with hybrid powertrains. They're small enough to easily park and maneuver but can carry four adults comfortably. They ride and handle better than subcompacts and are less costly than similarly sized SUVs.
CONS: They can be tricky to get into and out of, AWD is rare, and rear visibility is limited.

Midsized/Large
MIDSIZED: $27,000 to $38,000
LARGE: $40,000 to $53,000
PROS: Shoppers will find that these cars have roomy interiors but usually have fuel economy that's similar to smaller cars. They accelerate quickly, they're fairly quiet, and the top trim levels often have near-luxury-level cabin materials. Generally, they can fit five adults with their luggage, they often offer AWD, and most active safety systems come standard.
CONS: There aren't a lot of choices in these categories—and they can get pricey. Their larger size means they can be difficult to park.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: SUBCOMPACT								
✓ **Hyundai Venue** 1.6L	64	$20,720			64	32	380	**Highs:** Fuel economy, braking, controls. **Lows:** Ride, noise, fit and finish, tight rear seat, no adjustable seat-belt anchors.
Nissan Versa 1.6L	58	$18,980			64	32	345	**Highs:** Fuel economy, controls, standard active safety features for the price. **Lows:** Ride, engine noise, seat comfort.
Chevrolet Trax 1.3T	57	$24,680			64	31	430	**Highs:** Fuel economy, controls, visibility. **Lows:** Fit and finish, seat comfort, agility.
Mitsubishi Mirage 1.2L	38	$16,050			35	37	345	**Highs:** Easy to park, excellent fuel economy. **Lows:** Clumsy handling, very loud inside, weak engine, powertrain vibrations, awkward driving position.
CARS: COMPACT								
✓ **Kia Niro PHEV** 1.6H+E	85	$35,940			87	47	33[E]+460	**Highs:** Drives on electric power part time, fuel economy is better than Niro Hybrid's, hatchback practicality. **Lows:** Confusing audio/climate controls, rear three-quarter visibility, long wet-braking distance, AWD isn't available.
✓ **Toyota Prius (AWD)** 2.0H	80	$33,909			76	51	570	**Highs:** Fuel economy, quick acceleration for its class, hatchback versatility, optional AWD, reliability. **Lows:** Cabin access and visibility hurt by styling, raucous engine noise when pushed, rear-seat comfort.
✓ **Kia Niro** 1.6H	79	$30,600			83	45	500	**Highs:** Fuel economy, secure handling, hatchback practicality. **Lows:** Rear visibility, road noise, confusing audio/climate controls.
✓ **Mazda3** 2.5L	78	$24,115			77	30	400	**Highs:** Fuel economy, fit and finish, quietness, handling, braking. **Lows:** Complicated infotainment system.
✓ **Hyundai Elantra Hybrid** 1.6H	77	$24,900			85	48	530	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, braking, controls. **Lows:** Cabin access.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GIORDANO POLONI

Kia Niro PHEV

EXPERT TIP

"Subcompacts may have a good price, but larger, better-equipped, and more comfortable compact models are often priced similarly and have higher owner satisfaction scores."

ALEX KNIZEK
Associate Director,
Auto Test Development

PHOTO: KIA

HOW WE TEST: These charts provide a reference guide to the vehicles we have recently tested so that you can see how they match up. In this issue we have ratings for 257 vehicles, organized by category and ranked by Overall Score, to provide you with a quick reference guide for shopping.

■ **Recommended** vehicles are those that meet CR's stringent testing, reliability, and safety standards. To earn our recommendation, noted with a ✔, vehicles must have a high Overall Score in their category.

■ The **Green Choice** designation, developed in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency, indicates which 2024 models are in the top 20 percent of the cleanest-emitting vehicles from their model year. These are identified with a ♲.

■ **Overall Score** includes the vehicle's performance in our road tests; results from the reliability and owner satisfaction sections of CR's Auto Surveys; the availability of crash-prevention systems (automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection and at highway speeds, blind spot warning, rear cross traffic warning, and driver monitoring), and, if available, crash-test results from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. SUVs are tested with all- or four-wheel drive except where noted.

■ **Price** reflects the sticker price at the time we bought the tested vehicle.

■ **Survey results** reflect findings from CR's Auto Surveys, which are completed by CR members.

■ **Predicted reliability** is our forecast of how well a new model will hold up based on problems our members reported in CR's Auto Surveys, which cover over 330,000 vehicles.

■ **Owner satisfaction** is based on the percentage of surveyed CR members who said they would definitely buy or lease their vehicle again.

■ To determine our **reliability** and **owner satisfaction** predictions, we use a model's last three years of data, provided it hasn't been redesigned or significantly updated. In cases where we have insufficient survey responses or when a model is all new or redesigned, we use our judgment based on the brand's track record along with similar models.

■ **Road-test score** is based on results from more than 50 objective and subjective tests and evaluations performed at our 327-acre Auto Test Center in central Connecticut.

■ **Overall mpg** comes from our fuel-economy tests. For plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, mpg is measured when electric-only range is depleted.

■ **CR range** is the distance in miles covered by a full tank of gas plus EPA range for PHEVs. For EVs, CR range is the distance traveled in miles during our 70-mph highway test or from the EPA if not tested by CR. "E" denotes EPA-range figures.

■ **High and lows** give a summary of a model's notable strengths and weaknesses.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: COMPACT *Continued*								
Toyota Prius Prime 2.0H+E	76	$39,004	▲	▲	78	43	39E+455	**Highs:** Part-time electric driving, excellent fuel economy when operating as a hybrid, quick acceleration, hatchback versatility. **Lows:** Cabin access and outward visibility hurt by styling, noisy engine when pushed, rear-seat comfort.
Subaru Impreza 2.0L	76	$28,253	▲	●	78	29	480	**Highs:** Handling, short stops on dry pavement, hatchback versatility, standard AWD. **Lows:** Slow acceleration.
Toyota Corolla 2.0L	75	$24,835	▲	●	74	36	470	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, controls. **Lows:** Tight rear seat, cabin access.
Hyundai Elantra 2.0L	74	$23,000	▲	▼	79	33	405	**Highs:** Fuel economy, secure handling, braking, easy-to-use controls. **Lows:** Engine noise, ride, cabin access.
Toyota Corolla Hybrid 1.8H	74	$25,145	▲	●	75	48	550	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, controls. **Lows:** Slow acceleration, tight rear seat, cabin access.
Kia Soul 2.0L	73	$25,320	●	●	77	28	395	**Highs:** Braking, controls, cabin access, passenger space. **Lows:** Ride, loud engine.
Toyota Corolla Hatchback 2.0L	73	$24,263	▲	▼	70	36	470	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, braking, controls. **Lows:** Ride, engine noise, tight rear seat.
Honda Civic 2.0L	71	$24,095	●	●	74	33	405	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, braking, controls. **Lows:** Noise, stiff ride, cabin access.
Nissan Sentra 2.0L	70	$21,400	●	▼▼	83	32	400	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, handling, braking, controls, roomy rear seat. **Lows:** Front seat is short on lower back support, foot-operated parking brake, headlight performance.
Volkswagen Jetta 1.5T	55	$23,325	▼	▼▼	81	34	440	**Highs:** Fuel economy, relatively roomy cabin. **Lows:** Reliability, low dash vents.
CARS: MIDSIZED/LARGE								
Honda Accord Hybrid 2.0H	89	$32,990	▲	●	96	40	510	**Highs:** Fuel economy, hybrid powertrain, handling, interior room, user-friendly controls. **Lows:** Mediocre seat comfort and fit and finish.
Honda Accord 1.5T	78	$30,705	●	▼	85	32	470	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, handling, interior room, user-friendly controls. **Lows:** Mediocre seat comfort and fit and finish.
Toyota Crown 2.5H	78	$47,583	●	●	85	42	605	**Highs:** Fuel economy, easy cabin access, roomy cabin. **Lows:** Hidden trunk release, sunroof doesn't open.
Subaru Legacy 2.5L	77	$27,609	●	●	89	28	515	**Highs:** Ride, transmission, standard AWD. **Lows:** Some climate functions require multiple steps.
Nissan Altima 2.5L	76	$29,330	●	▼▼	83	31	495	**Highs:** Fuel economy, controls, comfortable rear seat. **Lows:** Agility, cabin access, ride.
Hyundai Sonata 2.5L	74	$28,615	●	●	83	31	485	**Highs:** Fuel economy, secure handling, braking. **Lows:** Ride.
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid 2.0H	72	$31,915	●	●	81	44	690	**Highs:** Fuel economy, secure handling, available tech features. **Lows:** Ride, rough shifts.
Chevrolet Malibu 1.5T	67	$26,790	●	▼	81	29	370	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, controls. **Lows:** Raspy turbo engine, front-seat comfort, hampered visibility.

Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid

EXPERT TIP

"Small SUVs are the most popular vehicle category, so deals can be scarce. Your best bet for a discount on one is when a redesigned version arrives."

JENNIFER STOCKBURGER
Director, Test Track Operations

SUVs

Hybrids and PHEVs (plug-in hybrid electric vehicles) are well-represented among SUVs. Make sure any PHEV you consider buying can be driven at least 30 miles on a charge. Anything less isn't a great value.

Subcompacts
$23,000 to $32,000
PROS: These smallest models are easy to maneuver and park, and all are available with all-wheel drive.
CONS: Most have a stiff ride, are sluggish and loud when accelerating, and have modest cargo room with the rear seats up.

Compacts
$28,000 to $38,000
PROS: The most fuel-efficient hybrids and PHEVs often exceed 30 mpg. They all have room for five adults and can be taken on muddy gravel roads.
CONS: The standard engines in these tend to be loud and underpowered.

Midsized
$34,000 to $55,000
PROS: These have the best balance of power and interior space, with two-row models easily carrying five people and their luggage. Some can tow up to 5,000 pounds.
CONS: The third-row seats are mostly suitable only for children, and there's scant cargo room with third-row seats raised. Only hybrid versions get more than 22 mpg.

Large
$55,000 to $80,000
PROS: Consider these if you tow heavy loads or carry eight people and their bags.
CONS: These can be pricey. They also have awkward handling, they're fuel-thirsty, and they're tricky to drive and park in cities.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: SUBCOMPACT								
Subaru Crosstrek 2.0L	87	$29,685	⏫	⬆	82	29	490	**Highs:** Ride comfort, fuel economy, short stopping distances, visibility, standard AWD, reliability. **Lows:** Standard engine feels underpowered and sounds strained.
Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid 2.0H	79	$31,795	⬆	●	82	41	430	**Highs:** Fuel economy, short braking distances, standard AWD. **Lows:** Loud cabin, cheap interior.
Honda HR-V 2.0L	74	$28,790	⏫	⬇	70	27	380	**Highs:** Fuel economy, controls, roomy interior for its size, reliability. **Lows:** Stiff ride, noisy cabin, slow acceleration.

PHOTO: TOYOTA

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: SUBCOMPACT *Continued*								
✓ **Toyota Corolla Cross** 2.0L	69	$28,329	↑	↓	68	28	370	**Highs:** Fuel economy, braking, cabin access. **Lows:** Noisy, feels underpowered, handling lacks agility, fit and finish.
✓ **Kia Seltos** 2.0L	68	$24,820	–	↓↓	73	28	365	**Highs:** Fuel economy, braking, controls, visibility. **Lows:** Ride, noise.
✓ **Mazda CX-30** 2.5L	68	$28,645	↑	↓	65	27	340	**Highs:** Fuel economy, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, engine noise, tight quarters, visibility.
Chevrolet Trailblazer 1.3T	63	$28,360	–	↓	68	27	360	**Highs:** Fuel economy, interior room, midrange torque, controls. **Lows:** Rear and side visibility, dull handling, front-seat comfort.
Hyundai Kona 2.0L	62	$31,440	–	–	72	26	330	**Highs:** User-friendly controls, outward visibility, cabin access, secure handling and braking. **Lows:** Fit and finish, base engine a bit noisy and underpowered.
Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross 1.5T	59	$31,495	–	↓	61	24	380	**Highs:** Cabin access, roomy rear seat. **Lows:** Agility, visibility, front-seat comfort, slow acceleration, cargo space.
Volkswagen Taos 1.5T	47	$33,064	↓↓	↓↓	75	26	380	**Highs:** Agility, braking, visibility, rear-seat room. **Lows:** Reliability, uneven power delivery.
SUVs: COMPACT								
✓ **Toyota RAV4 Prime** 2.5H+E	89	$45,923	↑↑	↑	88	34	42^{E}+500	**Highs:** Acceleration, part-time EV driving, fuel economy, ride, controls, reliability. **Lows:** Long stopping distances, distracting high-pitched warning signal in Reverse.
✓ **Kia Sportage PHEV** 1.6T+E	87	$41,320	↑	–	92	31	34^{E}+345	**Highs:** Can drive on electric power part time, comfortable ride, responsive handling, roomy interior. **Lows:** Overall fuel economy on gas is worse than the Hybrid, frustrating dual audio/climate panel.
✓ **Honda CR-V** 1.5T	85	$34,250	↑	↑	88	26	360	**Highs:** Generous interior room, braking, simple controls, easy cabin access. **Lows:** Slightly underpowered.
✓ **Hyundai Tucson Hybrid** 1.6T+H	85	$33,194	–	–	94	35	480	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, ride, roomy interior. **Lows:** Nothing of note.
✓ **Honda CR-V Hybrid** 2.0H	84	$35,650	–	↑	93	35	495	**Highs:** Fuel economy, pleasant hybrid powertrain, generous interior room, simple controls, easy cabin access. **Lows:** Noisy cabin.
✓ **Hyundai Tucson** 2.5L	82	$31,969	↑	–	85	26	370	**Highs:** Handling, ride, braking, roomy interior, controls. **Lows:** Slow acceleration for the class.
✓ **Hyundai Tucson PHEV** 1.6T+E	82	$39,440	–	–	94	31	33^{E}+345	**Highs:** Can drive on electric power part time, comfortable ride, responsive handling, roomy interior. **Lows:** Fuel economy on gas is worse than the Hybrid.
✓ **Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV** 2.4H+E	82	$47,225	↑↑	–	79	25	38^{E}+365	**Highs:** Can drive on electric power part time, standard third-row seat, user-friendly controls. **Lows:** Stiff ride, darty steering, fuel economy in hybrid mode no better than regular Outlander.
✓ **Kia Sportage Hybrid** 1.6T+H	79	$32,905	–	–	85	36	490	**Highs:** Fuel economy, composed ride, roomy interior, easy cabin access. **Lows:** Braking, frustrating dual audio/climate panel.
✓ **Toyota RAV4 Hybrid** 2.5H	78	$34,193	↑	↑	80	37	540	**Highs:** Fuel economy. **Lows:** Ride, fit and finish.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: COMPACT *Continued*								
✓ **Mitsubishi Outlander** 2.5L	77	$34,340	⏫	➖	71	25	360	**Highs:** Standard third row, well-tuned CVT, controls, reliability. **Lows:** Ride, darty steering, wind noise, slow acceleration.
✓ **Mazda CX-50** 2.5L	76	$38,620	🔼	🔽	78	24	375	**Highs:** Handling, steering, fit and finish, interior room. **Lows:** Ride, underpowered with the base engine, controls.
✓ **Toyota RAV4** 2.5L	75	$32,109	🔼	🔽	73	27	395	**Highs:** Fuel economy. **Lows:** Engine noise, ride, fit and finish.
✓ **Mazda CX-5** 2.5L	75	$31,190	🔼	➖	77	24	370	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, handling. **Lows:** Compromised rear visibility, controls.
✓ **Kia Sportage** 2.5L	74	$31,220	➖	➖	77	25	355	**Highs:** Roomy interior, secure handling, composed ride, easy cabin access. **Lows:** Lackluster acceleration, frustrating dual audio/climate panel.
✓ **Ford Escape PHEV (FWD)** 2.5H+E	74	$43,725	➖	🔼	87	37	37^{E}+405	**Highs:** Handling agility, smooth transmission, very fuel-efficient, decent electric-only range. **Lows:** Limited front-seat adjustments, AWD isn't available.
✓ **Chevrolet Equinox** 1.5T	71	$33,730	➖	🔽	77	25	385	**Highs:** Interior room, ride, quietness, controls, infotainment system. **Lows:** So-so acceleration, interior fit and finish.
✓ **Nissan Rogue** 1.5T	70	$34,905	➖	🔽	81	25	360	**Highs:** Agility, controls, cabin access. **Lows:** Idle vibration, low dash vents.
✓ **Ford Escape Hybrid** 2.5H	70	$37,175	➖	➖	82	34	485	**Highs:** Fuel economy, agility, short stopping distances, controls. **Lows:** Overly sensitive brake pedal.
Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T	63	$31,645	🔽	🔽	84	25	380	**Highs:** Generous interior room, easy controls, cabin access, visibility. **Lows:** Reliability, slow acceleration.
Dodge Hornet PHEV 1.3T+E	62	$42,995	➖	🔼	70	29	32^{E}+320	**Highs:** Acceleration, fuel economy, part-time electric driving. **Lows:** Stiff ride, loud cabin, unintuitive controls, awkward driving position, poor visibility, cheap interior.
Ford Escape 1.5T	59	$33,850	🔽	⏬	71	26	405	**Highs:** Agility, short stopping distances, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, engine vibration, overly sensitive brake pedal.
Ford Bronco Sport 1.5T	58	$33,655	🔽	➖	75	25	395	**Highs:** Agility, braking, user-friendly controls, character. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, vibration at low revs, limited seat adjustments.
Dodge Hornet 2.0T	55	$34,675	➖	🔼	59	23	315	**Highs:** Quick acceleration. **Lows:** Stiff ride, loud cabin, unintuitive controls, awkward driving position, poor visibility, cheap interior.
SUVs: MIDSIZED								
✓ **Mazda CX-70** 3.3T	81	$40,805	🔼	➖	83	24	435	**Highs:** Acceleration, agile handling, sharp steering, dry-braking distances. **Lows:** Controls, unintuitive gear selector, stiff ride with 21-inch tires.
✓ **Subaru Outback** 2.4T	79	$39,572	➖	🔼	89	24	440	**Highs:** Ride, transmission, seat comfort, driving position, fit and finish, integrated roof crossbars. **Lows:** Some climate functions require multiple steps.
✓ **Toyota Venza** 2.5H	79	$40,160	🔼	➖	79	37	535	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ease of cabin access. **Lows:** Controls, visibility, road noise, cargo capacity.
✓ **Ford Edge** 2.0T	79	$42,610	🔼	➖	81	22	405	**Highs:** Quietness, handling, braking, interior room. **Lows:** Awkward driving position.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: MIDSIZED *Continued*								
✓ **Honda Passport** 3.5L	70	$39,937	–	–	76	21	400	**Highs:** Acceleration, interior room, quietness. **Lows:** Stiff ride.
✓ **Nissan Murano** 3.5L	69	$42,065	–	–	74	21	395	**Highs:** Plush interior, cabin access, easy infotainment system. **Lows:** Visibility, overly light steering, agility.
Chevrolet Blazer 3.6L	60	$43,290	↓	–	78	19	420	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, transmission, quietness, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, visibility, low dash vents.
Jeep Grand Cherokee 4xe 2.0T+E	55	$64,795	↓	–	75	21	25E+400	**Highs:** Part-time EV driving, quick acceleration, quiet cabin. **Lows:** Reliability, braking, fuel economy isn't much better than the standard V6, some odd controls.
Jeep Grand Cherokee 3.6L	54	$50,590	↓	↓	73	20	465	**Highs:** Smooth powertrain, quietness, roomy cabin. **Lows:** Reliability, long stopping distances, some odd controls.
Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport 2.0T	53	$40,580	↓	–	71	20	360	**Highs:** Interior room, cabin access, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, unintuitive controls.
Ford Bronco 2.7T	46	$53,505	↓	↑	51	18	385	**Highs:** Off-road ability, acceleration, character. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, long stopping distances, wind noise.
Jeep Wrangler 3.6L	25	$48,400	↓	–	34	18	395	**Highs:** Off-road ability, smooth transmission. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, stiff ride, wind noise, awkward cabin access.
SUVs: MIDSIZED THREE-ROW								
✓ **Toyota Highlander Hybrid** 2.5H	85	$47,595	↑	↑	86	35	590	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, roomy second-row seats. **Lows:** Some engine noise.
✓ **Kia Telluride** 3.8L	84	$40,855	–	↑↑	92	21	390	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, braking, interior room, controls. **Lows:** Short on handling agility.
✓ **Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid** 1.6T+H	84	$40,145	–	↑	94	34	605	**Highs:** Excellent fuel economy, comfortable ride, short stops, roomy second row, generous cargo area. **Lows:** Tight third-row seat.
✓ **Hyundai Palisade** 3.8L	83	$43,415	↑	↑	85	21	395	**Highs:** Powertrain, interior room, cabin access. **Lows:** Agility, unintuitive gear selector.
✓ **Mazda CX-90** 3.3T	82	$48,670	↑	↓	85	24	435	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, agile handling, sharp steering, short dry-stopping distances. **Lows:** Quirky controls, unintuitive gear selector, stiff ride with 21-inch tires on high-end trims.
✓ **Mazda CX-90 PHEV** 2.5H+E	80	$55,150	↑	–	81	23	25E+430	**Highs:** Can drive on electric power part time, handling agility. **Lows:** Stiff ride, unintuitive controls, powertrain refinement falls short, fuel economy is less than a non-PHEV.
✓ **Toyota Highlander** 2.4T	80	$46,328	↑	–	82	22	400	**Highs:** Ride, roomy second-row seats, easy cabin access. **Lows:** Turbo engine lacks refinement.
✓ **Toyota Grand Highlander** 2.4T	80	$49,457	↑	↑	81	22	390	**Highs:** Ride comfort, passenger and cargo room. **Lows:** Short on handling agility, engine noise.
✓ **Subaru Ascent** 2.4T	79	$43,867	–	↑	90	22	420	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, interior room, visibility, braking, controls, usable third-row seat. **Lows:** Short on handling agility.
✓ **Kia Sorento Hybrid** 1.6T+H	77	$40,975	–	↓↓	86	28	500	**Highs:** Fuel economy, rides better than regular Sorento. **Lows:** Hesitation when accelerating from a stop.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: MIDSIZED THREE-ROW *Continued*								
✓ **Honda Pilot** 3.5L	77	$50,240	●	⏫	85	21	380	**Highs:** Smooth powertrain, ride, braking, roomy interior, hospitable third-row seat, controls. **Lows:** Light and vague steering, short on handling agility.
✓ **Hyundai Santa Fe** 2.5T	75	$40,465	●	🔼	82	24	415	**Highs:** Comfortable ride, roomy second row, generous cargo area. **Lows:** Uneven power delivery, tight third-row seat.
✓ **Kia Sorento** 2.5T	72	$38,725	●	🔽	82	25	435	**Highs:** Controls, acceleration. **Lows:** Ride, dual-clutch transmission's low-speed vibration.
Dodge Durango 3.6L	66	$43,525	●	🔽	78	18	445	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, transmission, interior space, cabin access, front seats, third-row seat, towing capacity. **Lows:** Fuel economy, rear visibility, maneuverability.
Nissan Pathfinder 3.5L	62	$46,375	🔽	🔽	81	21	385	**Highs:** Powertrain, interior room, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, overly firm ride.
Volkswagen Atlas 2.0T	60	$47,121	🔽	🔽	78	20	360	**Highs:** Accommodations, third-row seat comfort, cabin access, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, unintuitive controls, fuel economy lags its peers.
Ford Explorer 2.3T	60	$49,940	🔽	🔽	74	21	370	**Highs:** Agility, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, transmission's lumpy shifts.
Jeep Grand Cherokee L 3.6L	51	$55,265	🔽	🔽	71	19	445	**Highs:** Transmission, interior space, roomy third row, towing capacity. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, slow acceleration, long stopping distances, noisy V6, controls.
SUVs: LARGE								
Toyota Sequoia 3.4T+H	64	$70,508	🔼	🔼	57	18	395	**Highs:** Powertrain, towing capacity. **Lows:** Fuel economy, clumsy handling, jostly ride, long stopping distances, no auto 4WD, tiny third-row seat.
Ford Expedition Max 3.5T	60	$75,430	●	●	66	16	460	**Highs:** Quietness, acceleration, controls, interior room. **Lows:** Fuel economy, ride, handling.
Nissan Armada 5.6L	57	$63,020	●	🔽	60	14	365	**Highs:** Smooth and robust powertrain, quietness, towing capacity, fit and finish. **Lows:** Fuel economy, agility, unsettled ride.
Jeep Wagoneer 3.0T	56	$82,285	🔽	●	75	18	465	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, smooth transmission, quietness, seat comfort, interior quality. **Lows:** Reliability, braking performance, fuel economy.
Chevrolet Suburban 5.3L	52	$74,375	🔽	●	69	16	440	**Highs:** Interior room, seat comfort, ride, quietness, infotainment. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, braking, gear selector, agility, high step-in, tall hood hurts visibility.
GMC Yukon 5.3L	51	$65,790	🔽	●	67	17	400	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, controls, interior room, seat comfort. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, gear selector, agility, high step-in, tall hood hurts visibility.
GMC Yukon XL 5.3L	51	$71,245	🔽	●	67	16	440	**Highs:** Interior room, seat comfort, ride, quietness, infotainment. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, braking, gear selector, agility, high step-in, tall hood hurts visibility.
Chevrolet Tahoe 5.3L	50	$63,650	🔽	●	67	17	400	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, controls, interior room, seat comfort. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, gear selector, agility, high step-in, tall hood hurts visibility.

Audi A3

EXPERT TIP

"Luxury cars often sell for below MSRP, and we saw some significant incentives this year, such as discounts of $1,500 to $10,000 on certain Audis."

MICHAEL CROSSEN
Lead Automotive Technician

Luxury Cars & SUVs

These models are super-comfortable and some can be fun to drive, although most of them require premium fuel. After the new-car warranty runs out, servicing a luxury car can be pricey.

Entry-Level

$35,000 to $55,000

PROS: The smallest models have nimble, sporty handling and quick acceleration. The front seats are often very comfortable and have power adjustments.

CONS: Some active safety systems are optional and packaged with pricey comfort features. The rear seats are often tight.

Compacts

$40,000 to $65,000

PROS: The best models return 27 to 29 mpg overall. Their cabins are a significant step up from entry-level models, with impressive fit and finish, high-quality materials, and plenty of room for four adults. Most active safety systems are standard.

CONS: The sportier models tend to have a stiff, almost harsh ride, and their controls are often cumbersome and distracting.

Midsized/Large

MIDSIZED: $48,000 to $80,000
LARGE: $85,000+

PROS: There are few corners being cut with these, and they feature the highest-quality materials throughout the cabin. Both their front and rear seats are comfortable and supportive, with generous rear-seat room. You'll find hybrids and PHEVs among midsized models.

CONS: Prices quickly escalate, with some models easily exceeding $100,000. Automakers often introduce their newest, most convoluted controls and infotainment systems in these models.

PHOTO: AUDI

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL								
✓ **Audi A3** 2.0T	77	$43,020			85	31	445	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, acceleration, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Tight rear seat.
✓ **BMW 228i Gran Coupe** 2.0T	74	$41,345			76	27	360	**Highs:** Eager powertrain and handling, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Cabin access, tight rear seat, ride.
✓ **Acura Integra** 1.5T	71	$34,395			79	31	380	**Highs:** Fuel economy, handling, controls, hatchback versatility. **Lows:** Ride, noise, low stance hurts cabin access.
✓ **Cadillac CT4** 2.0T	70	$49,215			78	25	445	**Highs:** Handling, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Rear-seat room and cabin access, scant in-cabin storage.
✓ **Buick Envista** 1.3T	65	$26,480			67	29	385	**Highs:** Well-equipped for the price, secure handling, short stopping distances, hatchback versatility. **Lows:** Noisy cabin, uneven power delivery, low-end interior materials, no AWD.
Mercedes-Benz CLA250 2.0T	47	$44,390			66	27	365	**Highs:** Handling, braking, fit and finish, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Ride, controls, hesitation off the line, tight rear seat, wimpy A/C.
CARS: LUXURY COMPACT								
✓ **BMW 330e xDrive** 2.0T+E	81	$53,455			87	28	20[E]+300	**Highs:** Handling agility, smooth powertrain, braking, comfortable seats, fit and finish, part-time EV driving. **Lows:** Fuel economy as a hybrid is slightly less than the regular 330i, short electric range, some unintuitive controls.
✓ **BMW 330i xDrive** 2.0T	78	$52,995			86	29	460	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, braking, transmission, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Unintuitive controls, overzealous lane keeping assistance.
✓ **Infiniti Q50** 3.0T	74	$48,775			82	22	440	**Highs:** Acceleration, agility, braking, visibility. **Lows:** Cumbersome infotainment system, small trunk.
✓ **Audi A4** 2.0T	72	$48,890			88	27	420	**Highs:** Ride, handling, quietness, transmission, fit and finish, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls including gear selector take getting used to, tight rear seat.
✓ **Lexus IS300** 3.5L	72	$45,345			67	22	390	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, fit and finish. **Lows:** Tight footwell, snug cabin, fuel economy, short on agility.
✓ **Volvo S60** 2.0T	70	$47,110			71	26	375	**Highs:** Braking, quietness, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Ride, controls.
✓ **Cadillac CT5** 2.0T	69	$53,520			76	24	410	**Highs:** Handling, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Unrefined transmission, engine noise, rear headroom, low dash vents.
✓ **Acura TLX** 2.0T	69	$45,025			66	23	370	**Highs:** Acceleration, transmission, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Infotainment system, engine and road noise, cabin access, tight rear seat.
Genesis G70 2.0T	64	$43,115			70	23	360	**Highs:** Handling, fit and finish. **Lows:** Tight quarters, gear selector, some controls.
Alfa Romeo Giulia 2.0T	56	$48,890			71	27	410	**Highs:** Sharp handling, quick steering. **Lows:** Controls, tight rear seat, limited driver's seat adjustments.
Mercedes-Benz C300 2.0T	49	$59,770			75	29	495	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, stiff ride, long stopping distances, unintuitive controls.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: LUXURY MIDSIZED/LARGE								
✓ **Lexus ES300h** 2.5H	88	$49,365	↑	↑	91	42	550	**Highs:** Fuel economy, ride, quietness, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, tight rear seat.
✓ **BMW 530i** 2.0T	83	$71,545	–	↑	91	29	465	**Highs:** Smooth powertrain, fuel economy, front seats, braking, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls.
✓ **Lexus ES350** 3.5L	82	$48,855	↑	↑	83	25	395	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, tight rear seat.
✓ **Audi A6** 2.0T	77	$59,390	–	↓	91	26	505	**Highs:** Handling, braking, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Hesitation off the line, scant in-cabin storage.
✓ **Audi A8** 3.0T	75	$97,595	–	–	91	21	460	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, transmission, interior room, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls require a learning curve, scant in-cabin storage.
✓ **Genesis G80** 2.5T	74	$56,920	–	↑	86	24	455	**Highs:** Ride, handling, braking, interior room, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, hidden exterior trunk release.
Lexus LS500 3.4T	66	$103,899	–	–	68	20	425	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, transmission, driver's seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, tight rear-seat space for class, small trunk.
Mercedes-Benz E350 2.0T	65	$77,740	↓	↑	88	28	485	**Highs:** Smooth ride, sharp handling, short stopping distances, quiet cabin, comfortable front seats, high-quality materials. **Lows:** Distracting controls.
Volvo S90 2.0T	58	$61,855	↓	–	71	23	360	**Highs:** Seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, ride comfort, coarse engine noise, unintuitive controls.
Maserati Ghibli 3.0T	51	$89,010	↓	↓	66	19	390	**Highs:** Exhaust sound, steering feedback, braking, acceleration, transmission, fit and finish. **Lows:** Fuel economy, ride, initial turbo lag, tight rear seat, cabin access, touchy brake pedal, fussy gear selector.
SUVs: LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL								
✓ **BMW X1** 2.0T	79	$46,495	–	↓↓	86	28	405	**Highs:** Nimble handling, short stopping distances, fuel economy, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Stiff ride, inconsistent power delivery, confusing controls.
✓ **Lexus UX250h** 2.0H	78	$37,740	↑↑	↓	75	37	395	**Highs:** Fuel economy, transmission, quietness, reliability. **Lows:** Controls, cramped interior, tight rear seat.
✓ **BMW X2** 2.0T	75	$46,295	–	–	80	29	415	**Highs:** Agile handling, short stopping distances, excellent fuel economy, comfortable front seats, high-quality cabin. **Lows:** Uneven power delivery, stiff ride, confusing controls, hampered rear visibility.
✓ **Audi Q3** 2.0T	70	$43,940	–	↓	82	23	365	**Highs:** Handling, braking, seat comfort. **Lows:** Loud engine, rear visibility.
Cadillac XT4 2.0T	64	$49,430	–	↓	76	23	370	**Highs:** Handling, transmission, braking, fit and finish, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Engine noise, ride.
Volvo XC40 2.0T	64	$41,510	–	–	70	24	335	**Highs:** Interior ambience, comfortable front seats. **Lows:** Stiff ride, frustrating controls, gear selector, engine noise.
Buick Encore GX 1.3T	63	$33,145	–	↓	68	26	340	**Highs:** Strong midrange acceleration, braking, infotainment system. **Lows:** Engine noise and vibration, tight rear seat.
Alfa Romeo Tonale 1.3T+E	56	$47,790	↓	↑	71	29	32[E]+320	**Highs:** Acceleration, fuel economy, part-time electric driving. **Lows:** Stiff ride, loud cabin, unintuitive controls, fit and finish.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL *Continued*								
Jaguar E-Pace 2.0T	52	$48,070	↓	↓	67	21	380	**Highs:** Handling, fit and finish. **Lows:** Uneven power delivery, ride, visibility, controls.
Mercedes-Benz GLA250 2.0T	52	$43,475	↓	⇊	75	27	360	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, fuel economy, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, rear and side visibility.
SUVs: LUXURY COMPACT								
✓ **Lexus NX450h+** 2.5H+E	88	$64,930	↑	↑	90	35	37[E]+505	**Highs:** Fuel economy, fit and finish, part-time electric driving. **Lows:** Visibility, annoying electronic door releases, fuel economy isn't as good as hybrid when not in EV mode.
✓ **BMW X3** 2.0T	86	$53,745	↑	↑	90	24	410	**Highs:** Handling, braking, transmission, quietness, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls require a learning curve.
✓ **Lexus NX350h** 2.5H	83	$47,590	↑	↑	84	38	550	**Highs:** Fuel economy, fit and finish. **Lows:** Visibility, annoying electronic door releases, touchy brake pedal, long stopping distances.
✓ **Acura RDX** 2.0T	81	$43,995	↑	–	80	22	375	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, short stopping distances, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, gear selector, engine noise, brake-pedal feel.
✓ **Porsche Macan** 2.9T	76	$63,290	↑	↑	79	19	370	**Highs:** Handling, powertrain, ride, quietness, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, towing capacity. **Lows:** Fuel economy, rear visibility, modest cargo area, controls.
✓ **Lincoln Corsair** 2.0T	72	$50,870	–	–	80	23	365	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, powertrain, braking, fit and finish. **Lows:** Some unintuitive controls.
✓ **Lexus NX350** 2.4T	72	$47,765	–	–	78	25	360	**Highs:** Fit and finish, braking. **Lows:** Annoying electronic door releases, gear selector, visibility.
✓ **Cadillac XT5** 3.6L	71	$51,025	–	–	75	20	445	**Highs:** Plush interior, seat comfort, quietness. **Lows:** Stiff ride, unintuitive gear selector, visibility.
✓ **Buick Envision** 2.0T	69	$43,180	–	–	77	23	370	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, braking, infotainment system. **Lows:** Unintuitive gear selector, low dash vents, front wheelspin.
Audi Q5 2.0T	68	$51,570	–	↓	82	24	455	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls require a learning curve.
Infiniti QX50 2.0T	67	$51,380	–	⇊	75	22	340	**Highs:** Quietness, fit and finish, braking. **Lows:** Confusing controls, short on agility.
Genesis GV70 2.5T	63	$51,095	↓	↑	81	24	410	**Highs:** Ride, handling, transmission, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, controls, rear visibility.
Maserati Grecale 2.0T	62	$77,845	↓	↑	83	24	405	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, agility, fit and finish. **Lows:** Unintuitive gear selector.
Volvo XC60 2.0T	60	$50,040	↓	↓	77	23	430	**Highs:** Seat comfort, fit and finish, braking. **Lows:** Reliability, stiff ride, maddening controls.
Volvo XC60 PHEV 2.0T+E	57	$67,290	↓	↓	86	28	35[E]+525	**Highs:** Acceleration, part-time EV driving, fuel economy, braking, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, overly stiff ride, unintuitive controls.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: LUXURY COMPACT *Continued*								
Alfa Romeo Stelvio 2.0T	57	$52,040	⌄	!	74	24	410	**Highs:** Handling, style, character. **Lows:** Controls, visibility, tight rear seat, limited seat adjustments, overly touchy brake pedal.
Land Rover Range Rover Velar 2.0T	56	$59,503	⌄	⌄	74	21	335	**Highs:** Handling, fit and finish. **Lows:** Stiff ride, distracting controls, visibility, fuel economy, brand reliability.
Mercedes-Benz GLB250 2.0T	55	$47,435	⌄	⌄⌄	81	26	415	**Highs:** Handling, braking, acceleration, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, low and flat rear seat.
Jaguar F-Pace 3.0T	54	$53,895	⌄	⌄	69	20	330	**Highs:** Agility, acceleration, braking, transmission, roomy rear seat. **Lows:** Ride, noise, rear visibility, inferior infotainment system, wimpy A/C.
Mercedes-Benz GLC300 2.0T	51	$58,195	⌄⌄	⌃	78	26	450	**Highs:** Quietness, fit and finish, front-seat comfort, dry-stopping distance. **Lows:** Unintuitive controls, overly firm ride, mushy brake pedal.
Land Rover Discovery Sport 2.0T	46	$49,895	⌄	⌄	57	21	370	**Highs:** Cabin access, spacious rear seat, some off-road ability. **Lows:** Transmission is slow to shift, uneven power delivery, ride, handling, controls, rear visibility.
Land Rover Range Rover Evoque 2.0T	46	$56,997	⌄	⌄	56	20	350	**Highs:** Front-seat comfort, fit and finish, agility, braking. **Lows:** Ride, controls, visibility, hesitation off the line.
SUVs: LUXURY MIDSIZED								
✓ **BMW X5** 3.0T	92	$68,730	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	94	23	495	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, transmission, braking, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls require a learning curve.
✓ **Lexus RX450h+** 2.5H+E	89	$75,860	⌃	⌃	94	34	37[E]+490	**Highs:** Part-time EV driving, fuel economy, comfortable ride, cabin materials. **Lows:** Noisy gas engine, some controls, hampered visibility.
✓ **BMW X5 PHEV** 3.0T+E	88	$82,945	!	⌃⌃	98	21	39[E]+375	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, ride comfort, braking, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls have a steep learning curve, fuel economy as a hybrid is worse than regular X5.
✓ **Lexus RX350h** 2.5H	83	$59,955	⌃	⌃	86	34	585	**Highs:** Fit and finish, rear-seat room, fuel economy. **Lows:** Rear/side visibility, unintuitive controls, louder gas engine.
✓ **Porsche Cayenne** 3.0T	81	$79,280	⌃	⌃	84	21	510	**Highs:** Handling, quietness, fit and finish, seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls, ride, uneven power delivery.
✓ **Lincoln Nautilus Hybrid** 2.0H	79	$64,170	!	!	81	30	605	**Highs:** Fuel economy, quiet cabin, roomy rear seat, finely crafted interior, excellent active driving assistance system. **Lows:** Handling lacks agility, confusing controls, awkward driving position.
✓ **Lexus RX350** 2.4T	78	$55,595	⌃	⌃	79	24	420	**Highs:** Fit and finish, rear-seat room. **Lows:** Rear/side visibility, unintuitive controls, louder turbo engine.
Mercedes-Benz GLE450 3.0T	61	$75,090	⌄	!	76	20	455	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, distracting controls.
Land Rover Range Rover Sport 3.0T	61	$92,170	⌄	⌃	81	20	480	**Highs:** Supple ride, quiet cabin, agile handling, fit and finish, seat comfort. **Lows:** Complicated controls.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: LUXURY MIDSIZED *Continued*								
Genesis GV80 3.5T	61	$65,775	⌄	⌃	75	18	375	**Highs:** Acceleration, transmission, handling, braking, quiet interior, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, controls.
Land Rover Defender 3.0T	47	$70,710	⌄	⌄	57	18	435	**Highs:** Acceleration, off-road ability, character. **Lows:** Fuel economy, braking, controls, agility, step-in height, rear visibility.
SUVs: LUXURY MIDSIZED THREE-ROW								
✓ **Lexus TX500h** 2.4T+H	87	$72,815	⌃	⌃	92	24	415	**Highs:** Acceleration, roomy cabin, comfortable ride, high-quality interior materials. **Lows:** Some unintuitive controls.
✓ **BMW X7** 3.0T	78	$84,095	–	⌃	90	22	475	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, transmission, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls have a learning curve.
✓ **Lexus TX350** 2.4T	77	$64,575	⌃	⌃	79	21	375	**Highs:** Lots of interior space, nicely finished cabin, comfortable ride. **Lows:** Some unintuitive controls.
✓ **Audi Q7** 3.0T	77	$71,010	–	⌄	87	20	440	**Highs:** Powertrain, quietness, agility, fit and finish, front- and second-row seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls have a learning curve.
✓ **Cadillac XT6** 3.6L	72	$62,515	–	–	76	18	385	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, transmission. **Lows:** Fuel economy, limited seat adjustments, missing some luxury features.
✓ **Acura MDX** 3.5L	70	$58,400	–	–	74	20	365	**Highs:** Smooth powertrain, front- and rear-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, braking, must get top trim for some luxury features.
✓ **Infiniti QX60** 3.5L	70	$59,835	–	⌄	81	21	385	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, fit and finish. **Lows:** Long wet-stopping distances.
Volvo XC90 2.0T	66	$65,395	⌄	–	80	20	380	**Highs:** Quietness, seat comfort, fit and finish, visibility, braking. **Lows:** Reliability, stiff ride, unintuitive controls.
Mercedes-Benz GLS450 3.0T	65	$89,030	⌄	–	82	20	540	**Highs:** Powertrain, ride, quietness, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, distracting controls.
Lexus GX 3.4T	65	$71,610	⌃	⌃	62	18	370	**Highs:** Strong off-road ability, impressive cabin, fit and finish. **Lows:** Clumsy on-road handling, unsettled ride, fuel economy.
Lincoln Aviator 3.0T	62	$64,920	⌄	⌄	78	19	385	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, ride, quietness, fit and finish, cargo room. **Lows:** Reliability, fuel economy, controls, gear selector.
Land Rover Discovery 3.0T	52	$69,260	⌄	⌄	65	17	405	**Highs:** Acceleration, ride, quietness, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Fuel economy, agility, controls, low rear seat, third-row seat access.
SUVs: LUXURY LARGE								
Cadillac Escalade 6.2L	63	$98,740	–	⌃⌃	72	16	375	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, powertrain, acceleration, fit and finish, seat comfort, Super Cruise assisted driving. **Lows:** Fuel economy, handling, tall hood compromises front visibility.
Lincoln Navigator 3.5T	54	$86,480	⌄	–	58	16	455	**Highs:** Quietness, powertrain, second- and third-row seat room. **Lows:** Fuel economy, front seats, gear selector, clumsy handling.

Sports Cars

Sports cars are the last bastion of manual transmissions, but there are some—most notably the Chevrolet Corvette—that only come with an automatic.

EXPERT TIP

"While discounts are unlikely on cars like a Porsche or Corvette, mainstream models like a Mazda Miata will often have special financing deals, especially in winter, when demand is lower."

JOHN IBBOTSON
CR's Chief Mechanic

Mazda MX-5 Miata

PHOTO: MAZDA

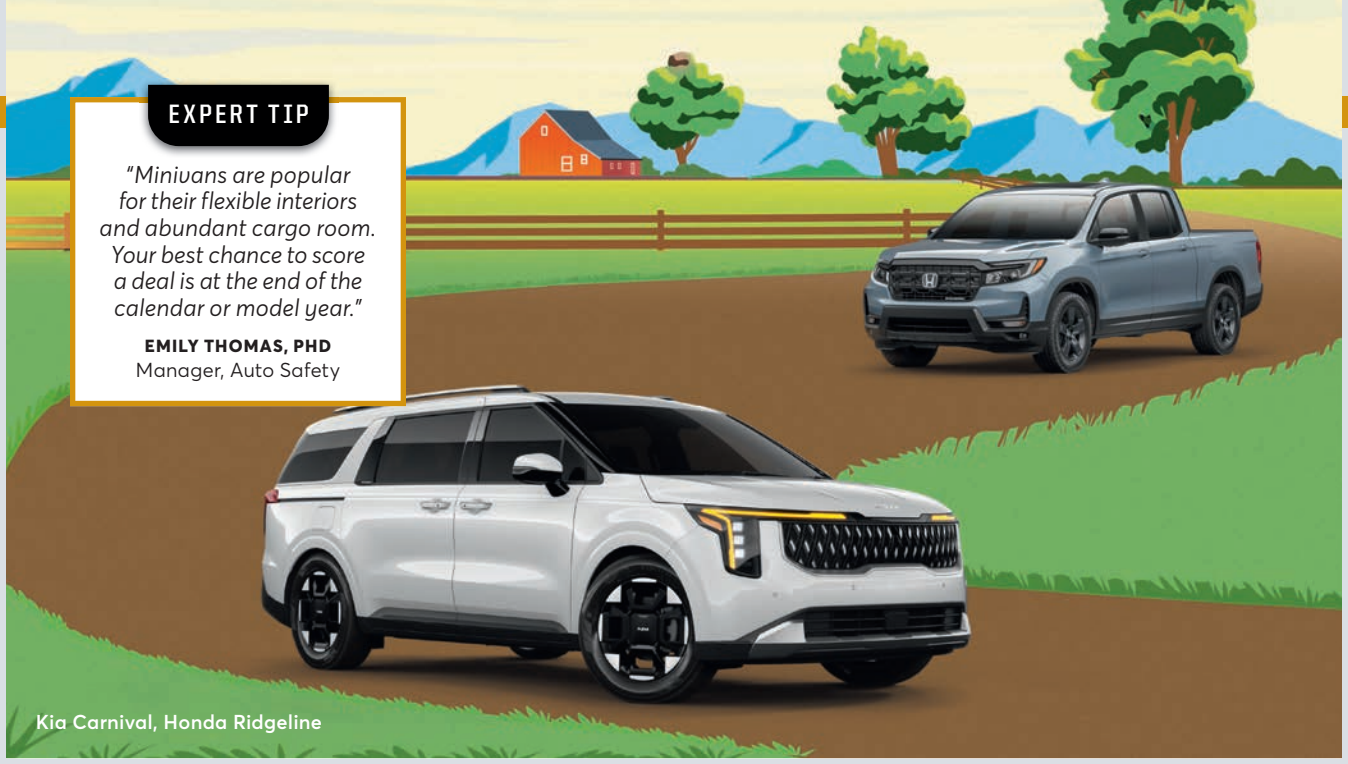
Sports Cars

$35,000 to $150,000+

PROS: There is a wide range of stylish body types to choose from with varying levels of performance to suit your needs. Driving enjoyment is the name of the game, so expect to find that each model delivers agile handling, strong and responsive brakes, and a loud, satisfying engine note.

CONS: Trade-offs abound in this category. So you may find that some models are difficult to get into and out of. On top of that, the ride quality can border on harsh for some models, and elevated levels of road and wind noise can become tiring. All these cars, even the least expensive ones, have tires that are costly and wear out quickly, and the cars are usually expensive to insure.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SPORTS CARS: 2-SEAT								
✓ **Porsche 718 Boxster** 2.0T	85	$69,790	^	^	95	26	365	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, braking, fit and finish, quick convertible top that works on the move. **Lows:** Ride, noise, cabin access, some controls, visibility with closed top, no AEB offered.
✓ **Toyota Supra** 3.0T	84	$56,115	^	^	91	27	365	**Highs:** Acceleration, transmission, handling, braking. **Lows:** Cabin access, visibility, ride, noise.
✓ **Chevrolet Corvette** 6.2L	81	$77,680	I	^^	97	19	360	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, braking, transmission, fit and finish. **Lows:** Fuel economy, cabin access, rear and side visibility.
✓ **Mazda MX-5 Miata** 2.0L	80	$32,715	^	^^	80	34	400	**Highs:** Agility, precise manual shifter, fuel economy, easy manual top. **Lows:** Ride, noise, tight quarters, cumbersome infotainment system, cabin access.
✓ **BMW Z4** 2.0T	80	$59,195	^	^	86	29	395	**Highs:** Handling, braking, acceleration, seat comfort, fit and finish, quick top operation. **Lows:** Ride, visibility, controls, overzealous lane keeping assistance.
✓ **Nissan Z** 3.0T	71	$52,125	I	^	80	24	400	**Highs:** Acceleration, sharp handling, strong braking, controls. **Lows:** Stiff ride, loud cabin, difficult to get into and out of, restricted outward visibility.
SPORTS CARS: 4/5-SEAT								
✓ **Subaru BRZ** 2.4L	85	$32,115	^	I	86	27	360	**Highs:** Satisfying ride/handling balance, acceleration, braking, controls. **Lows:** Noisy cabin, minuscule rear seat, difficult to get in and out, compromised outward views.
✓ **Subaru WRX** 2.4T	83	$33,227	^	^	83	25	420	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling agility, braking. **Lows:** Stiff ride, noisy cabin, slow-responding infotainment screen.
✓ **Toyota GR86** 2.4L	83	$32,206	^	I	83	28	375	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, braking, controls. **Lows:** Stiff ride, noise, tiny rear seat, difficult cabin access, outward visibility.
✓ **BMW 230i** 2.0T	80	$39,595	^	^	85	31	425	**Highs:** Handling, braking, acceleration, fuel economy, fit and finish, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Tight rear-seat room.
✓ **Ford Mustang GT** 5.0L	75	$55,200	I	^^	76	20	325	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, burly V8 sound, precise and easy-to-use manual shifter, enjoyable handling. **Lows:** Some unintuitive controls, awkward cabin access, tight rear seat.
✓ **Honda Civic Si** 1.5T	71	$28,315	I	I	74	32	390	**Highs:** Handling, slick manual shifter, fuel economy, controls. **Lows:** Ride, noise, cabin access.
Chevrolet Camaro 6.2L	68	$47,020	I	I	85	20	355	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, braking. **Lows:** Visibility, tight interior, low dash vents, no AEB offered.
Volkswagen Golf GTI 2.0T	61	$36,539	v	vv	85	28	365	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, braking, slick manual shifter. **Lows:** Reliability, distracting controls.



EXPERT TIP

"Minivans are popular for their flexible interiors and abundant cargo room. Your best chance to score a deal is at the end of the calendar or model year."

EMILY THOMAS, PHD
Manager, Auto Safety

Kia Carnival, Honda Ridgeline

Pickups & Minivans

Pickup trucks sell in large volumes and generate big sales for automakers. But models such as the Chevrolet Silverado, Ford F-150, and Ram 1500 often come with incentives on some trims.

Small Pickups
$24,000 to $35,000
PROS: Perfect for dump runs, these trucks handle and ride like a well-performing car. Their small engines make them fuel-efficient enough for daily use.
CONS: Most of these can't tow more than 5,000 pounds, and their small cargo beds limit what you can carry.

Midsized Pickups
$32,000 to $55,000
PROS: These trucks are often a better choice than a full-sized one because they offer strong towing/hauling capabilities in a manageable size.
CONS: Most have a stiff ride when the cargo bed is empty. Their fuel economy isn't significantly better than some full-sized pickup trucks.

Full-Sized Pickups
$37,000 to $80,000
PROS: If you need a workhorse truck, these let you tow a heavy trailer and haul heavy cargo in the open bed. Crew-cab versions can easily seat four adults.
CONS: Thirsty for fuel, most trucks have ponderous handling and a stiff, bouncy ride when empty. With add-ons, these trucks can cost as much as a luxury SUV.

Minivans
$37,000 to $53,000
PROS: A wise choice for families who need abundant space, minivans have a comfortable, composed ride and a quieter interior than SUVs.
CONS: Few models offer AWD, and fuel economy on nonhybrid vans is so-so.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
PICKUPS: SMALL								
Ford Maverick 2.0T	78	$29,965			78	23	380	**Highs:** Ride and handling, maneuverability, visibility, cabin access, controls. **Lows:** Noise, cabin quality.
Ford Maverick Hybrid (FWD) 2.5H	77	$32,925			82	37	505	**Highs:** Fuel economy, visibility, cabin access, controls, dry-stopping distance. **Lows:** Cabin quality.
Hyundai Santa Cruz 2.5T	74	$42,050			77	24	425	**Highs:** Acceleration, drives like a car, controls. **Lows:** Small bed, rear visibility.

PHOTOS: KIA, HONDA

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results			Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
PICKUPS: MIDSIZED								
✓ **Honda Ridgeline** 3.5L	78	$36,480	●	▲	83	20	380	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, clever in-bed storage and dual-mode tailgate. **Lows:** Low towing capacity, shallow bed.
Toyota Tacoma 2.4T	62	$46,787	●	●	59	20	365	**Highs:** User-friendly controls, off-road ability. **Lows:** Stiff ride, clumsy handling, rough-sounding engine, high step-in for cabin access.
Chevrolet Colorado 2.7T	56	$41,070	▼	●	71	19	410	**Highs:** Relatively agile handling, ride comfort, automatic 4WD mode. **Lows:** Raspy engine, tight rear seat.
GMC Canyon 2.7T	56	$44,970	▼	●	71	19	410	**Highs:** Relatively agile handling, ride comfort, automatic 4WD mode. **Lows:** Raspy engine, tight rear seat.
Nissan Frontier 3.8L	48	$40,630	▼	▼	67	18	370	**Highs:** Braking, transmission, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, tight rear seat, no telescoping steering column.
Jeep Gladiator 3.6L	45	$46,405	▼	●	52	18	400	**Highs:** Powertrain, towing capacity, character. **Lows:** Reliability, handling, wind noise, awkward window controls.
PICKUPS: FULL-SIZED								
Nissan Titan 5.6L	64	$44,370	●	▼	70	16	405	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, roomy cab, light tailgate. **Lows:** Fuel economy, ride, fit and finish.
Ford F-150 2.7T	64	$55,535	▼	●	75	19	485	**Highs:** Quietness, cabin room, quick acceleration, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, agility, high step-in.
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 5.3L	56	$50,225	▼	●	78	17	400	**Highs:** Interior room, deep bed, quietness. **Lows:** Reliability, step-in height.
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 3.0D	56	$50,225	▼	●	78	23	560	**Highs:** Interior room, deep bed, quietness. **Lows:** Reliability, step-in height.
GMC Sierra 1500 5.3L	56	$52,100	▼	●	78	17	400	**Highs:** Fuel economy, interior room, deep bed, quietness. **Lows:** Reliability, long stopping distances, step-in height.
GMC Sierra 1500 3.0D	56	$52,100	▼	●	78	23	560	**Highs:** Fuel economy, interior room, deep bed, quietness. **Lows:** Reliability, long stopping distances, step-in height.
Ford F-150 Hybrid 3.5T+H	55	$69,935	▼▼	▼	79	20	600	**Highs:** Quietness, cabin room, acceleration, controls, hybrid's generator. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, agility, high step-in.
Toyota Tundra 3.4T	54	$53,393	▼	●	71	17	540	**Highs:** Quietness, cabin room, quick acceleration, controls. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, agility, high step-in.
MINIVANS								
✓ **Kia Carnival** 3.5L	82	$40,785	▲	●	85	21	395	**Highs:** Smooth powertrain, short stopping distances, interior room, controls. **Lows:** Agility, must remove heavy second-row seats for max cargo capacity.
✓ **Toyota Sienna** 2.5H	77	$43,570	●	▲	84	36	650	**Highs:** Fuel economy, interior room and versatility. **Lows:** Long stopping distances.
✓ **Honda Odyssey** 3.5L	76	$43,655	●	▲	83	22	425	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, interior room and flexibility, kid-friendly tech. **Lows:** Some controls take getting used to.
✓ **Chrysler Pacifica** 3.6L	70	$44,345	●	●	81	21	390	**Highs:** Interior space and flexibility, ride, quietness, Uconnect infotainment system, cabin access. **Lows:** Coarse-sounding engine.
Chrysler Pacifica PHEV 3.6H+E	53	$54,825	▼▼	▼	86	27	32^{E}+440	**Highs:** Interior space, ride, quietness, Uconnect infotainment system, cabin access, fuel economy. **Lows:** Reliability, PHEV loses Stow 'n Go seating/cargo flexibility.

Hyundai Ioniq 6

EXPERT TIP

"Many EVs are eligible for tax incentives up to $7,500, and automakers have highly discounted several models because sales have softened."

GABE SHENHAR
Associate Director, Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center

EVs

Don't obsess over range. More public EV chargers are being installed every year, and many 2025 models will have a Tesla-style port, so they can use the nationwide Supercharger network.

Electric Cars

$50,000 to $80,000
PROS: All of these are quick, have quiet interiors, and provide plenty of room for both passengers and cargo. Being able to charge overnight at home is a bonus.
CONS: Many have fussy controls in an attempt to be "cutting edge." The driving experience is often hurt by the stiff ride and brakes that feel grabby.

Electric SUVs

$60,000 to $100,000+
PROS: Like EV cars, these have quick acceleration and quiet interiors with generous room for both passengers and cargo. Some even have a front trunk.
CONS: Big and heavy, luxury EVs tend to ride stiffly. Many of them are expensive and don't qualify for tax credits, and it takes a long time to charge their big batteries.

Electric Pickups

$62,000 to $100,000+
PROS: EV pickups feature a lockable front trunk, giving you a secure place to store your stuff rather than leaving it exposed in the truck bed in back.
CONS: Towing quickly drains the battery, so on trips you'll have to recharge frequently.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results		Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted Reliability	Owner Satisfaction	Road-test score	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: ELECTRIC							
✓ **Hyundai Ioniq 6**	83	$52,975	▲	▲▲	84	265	**Highs:** Brisk acceleration, sharp handling, brake-pedal feel, quiet cabin, relatively quick DC fast charging. **Lows:** Inconvenient placement of window and mirror controls.
✓ **Kia Niro EV**	71	$42,595	●	▲	76	239	**Highs:** Smooth power, hatchback practicality, good range for a less expensive EV. **Lows:** Rear and side visibility, frustrating audio/climate control panel.
Hyundai Kona Electric	58	$38,460	▼	▲	73	245	**Highs:** Acceleration, short stops, long range, controls, speedy charging. **Lows:** Interior has lots of hard plastic, noisy cabin for an EV.
Nissan Leaf	57	$44,330	●	▼	61	212[E]	**Highs:** Quietness, quick acceleration. **Lows:** Charging times, short range, driving position, handling lacks agility, incompatible with most DC fast charging.

PHOTO: HYUNDAI

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results		Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted Reliability	Owner Satisfaction	Road-test score	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
CARS: LUXURY ELECTRIC							
✓ BMW i5	86	$91,695			94	295	**Highs:** Acceleration, ride, quietness, seat comfort, high-quality interior, stopping distances. **Lows:** Controls, relatively small trunk.
✓ BMW i4	83	$73,245			91	318	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, handling, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, hatchback versatility. **Lows:** Cramped rear seat, confusing controls.
✓ Porsche Taycan	76	$128,520			78	235[E]	**Highs:** Acceleration, ride, handling, front-seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls, limited range, visibility.
✓ Tesla Model 3	73	$48,380			83	334	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, short stopping distances, agile handling, comfortable front seats, access to Tesla Supercharger network. **Lows:** Distracting controls, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.
Lucid Air	69	$128,550			94	344	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, handling, rear-seat room. **Lows:** Reliability, electric motor whine, wind noise, unintuitive controls, restricted outward visibility.
Tesla Model S	63	$92,690			86	366	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, quietness, hatchback versatility, access to Tesla Supercharger network. **Lows:** Reliability, odd steering wheel shape, controls, cabin access, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.
Mercedes-Benz EQE	59	$80,210			84	332	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, ride, maneuverability, short stopping distances, fit and finish. **Lows:** Mushy brake-pedal feel, distracting controls.
Mercedes-Benz EQS	59	$135,875			90	380	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, ride, maneuverability, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Reliability, brake-pedal feel, driving position, distracting controls.
Polestar 2	38	$62,400			69	276[E]	**Highs:** Acceleration, braking, handling, hatchback versatility. **Lows:** Reliability, ride, controls, cramped interior.
SUVs: ELECTRIC							
✓ Kia EV6	77	$52,840			86	277	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, braking, handling. **Lows:** Poor outward visibility, awkward exterior door handles.
✓ Nissan Ariya	70	$63,020			70	253	**Highs:** Acceleration, quiet interior, roomy cabin. **Lows:** Extra steps to unplug, grabby brake-pedal feel, weak onboard charger.
✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E	70	$55,800			74	299	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, quietness. **Lows:** Fussy door handles, controls.
Hyundai Ioniq 5	67	$51,020			86	267	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, handling. **Lows:** Reliability.
Subaru Solterra	62	$50,432			67	210	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, agile handling. **Lows:** Slow charging and short range compared with other EVs, stingy EV-specific displays, no glove box.
Toyota bZ4X	62	$51,009			67	210	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, agile handling. **Lows:** Slow charging and short range compared with other EVs, stingy EV-specific displays, no glove box.
Volkswagen ID.4	57	$50,870			78	253	**Highs:** Acceleration, ride, quietness, roomy interior. **Lows:** Reliability, controls, unpleasant pedestrian warning sound, brake-pedal feel.
Chevrolet Blazer EV	56	$60,000			68	275	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, long range. **Lows:** Slow steering, stiff ride, long stopping distances, low dash air vents, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results		Highs + Lows
		As tested	Predicted Reliability	Owner Satisfaction	Road-test score	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	
SUVs: ELECTRIC THREE-ROW							
✓ Kia EV9	79	$65,620	!	^	88	285	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, short stopping distances, roomy interior, relatively speedy public charging. **Lows:** Short on handling agility, controls take some familiarity.
Mercedes-Benz EQS SUV	58	$111,580	v	^	83	314	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, short stopping distances, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Distracting controls, mushy brake-pedal feel.
Tesla Model X	53	$94,130	v	^	74	335E	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, access to Tesla Supercharger network. **Lows:** Reliability, fussy rear doors, ride, wind noise, rear visibility, controls, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.
Rivian R1S	52	$79,250	v	^^	72	316E	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, generous cargo space. **Lows:** Reliability, stiff ride, unintuitive controls, abrupt regenerative braking, awkward exterior door handles, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.
SUVs: ELECTRIC LUXURY							
✓ BMW iX	84	$92,695	!	^	91	370	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, agility, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Confusing controls.
✓ Genesis GV60	75	$60,220	!	^	86	251	**Highs:** Acceleration, quiet cabin, front seats, interior material quality. **Lows:** Driving range, distracting controls, compromised rear visibility.
✓ Lexus RZ	74	$63,405	^	!	70	202	**Highs:** Comfortable ride, quiet cabin, quick acceleration. **Lows:** Short driving range and slow charging, unintuitive controls, long wet-stopping distances, no glove box.
✓ Tesla Model Y	72	$61,190	!	^	88	330E	**Highs:** Handling, acceleration, braking, seat comfort, access to Tesla Supercharger network. **Lows:** Ride, controls, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.
✓ Audi Q8 E-Tron	71	$80,450	!	!	86	285E	**Highs:** Ride, quietness, acceleration, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Some controls take getting used to.
✓ Audi Q4 E-Tron	71	$60,580	!	v	79	226	**Highs:** Quiet cabin, acceleration, braking, seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Spongy brake pedal, unlit climate controls.
✓ Genesis Electrified GV70	69	$67,595	!	^	79	220	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, fit and finish, seat comfort. **Lows:** Controls, inconveniently placed front charging port, rear visibility.
Cadillac Lyriq	65	$73,945	v	^	84	315	**Highs:** Acceleration, quiet cabin, ride/handling balance, interior quality, fast home charging. **Lows:** Awkward door handles, thick roof pillars hamper visibility.
Jaguar I-Pace	54	$86,841	v	v	72	246E	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, quietness, fit and finish. **Lows:** Controls, brake-pedal feel, brand reliability, slow public charging.
Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV	54	$84,690	v	^	76	284	**Highs:** Acceleration, short dry-stopping distance, quiet cabin, comfortable front seats, interior quality. **Lows:** Distracting controls, squishy brakes.
Volvo C40	52	$62,340	v	^	66	232	**Highs:** Quick acceleration, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish. **Lows:** Stiff ride, wind noise, unintuitive controls, rear seat, visibility.
PICKUPS: ELECTRIC							
Ford F-150 Lightning	69	$80,889	v	!	81	270	**Highs:** Acceleration, quietness, roomy cab, front trunk, rides better than regular F-150. **Lows:** Reliability, distracting controls, long stopping distances.
Rivian R1T	58	$74,500	v	^^	84	334	**Highs:** Acceleration, handling, quietness, creative storage spaces. **Lows:** Reliability, intrusive regenerative braking, unintuitive controls, awkward exterior door handles, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

The Right Way to Check Your Oil

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON

YOU'VE PROBABLY BEEN CHECKING your oil for years, but do you know whether you've been doing it correctly? CR's experts say it's an important preventive maintenance task on cars that come with a dipstick—the long metal strip that extends into the oil pan from near the top of the engine. Most new cars have an electronic oil level sensor, but that may alert you only when the oil is already critically low. Plenty of new cars still have dipsticks, and if yours does, you should check the oil regularly.

"Even newer cars can develop oil leaks or burn oil, and both make your oil level run low," says Michael Crossen, a mechanic at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "There's no way you'd know unless you check your oil regularly. If an engine gets too low on oil, the resulting metal-on-metal friction and heat can quickly destroy it."

The dipstick is easy to find: The handle is often a small pull ring (typically yellow) or lock tab and usually says "oil" on it. Using it to check the oil is a simple task. Not checking the oil or doing it the wrong way can result in engine damage.

WHEN TO CHECK THE OIL

Crossen recommends checking the oil at least every other time you fill up the fuel tank—more often if your mechanic says that your car has a slow leak or that the engine is burning oil. "Many cars' engines hold about 5 quarts of oil," he says. "So if the engine is losing oil, you could be missing 20 percent of your oil after a couple of fill-ups. If that continues, it can lead to oil starvation and, eventually, severe engine damage."

EXPERT TIP Gas stations are great places to check the oil because the surface at the gas pumps is level, which is key for an accurate reading. Be sure to bring a rag in case they're out of paper towels.

READING THE DIPSTICK

CAUTION: Don't touch a hot engine. Pull the dipstick out of its tube and wipe it clean with a paper towel or rag. Fully reinsert the dipstick and pull it out again. The end of the dipstick usually has two lines or dots to denote "full" and "add oil." If the level falls between the two lines, there's enough oil. If it's below the "add" mark, you could fry your engine.

EXPERT TIP "Many manufacturers advise checking the oil when the engine is cold, but checking it just after you fill the gas tank is fine," Crossen says. "It may read a little low if the engine is still warm, but the important thing is that the level reads between the marks."

CHOOSING THE RIGHT OIL

Modern engines often require a very specific type of oil, Crossen says. You can find the exact type of oil your car needs in the owner's manual. "It's okay to use a different viscosity as a temporary fix if there's nothing else available," he says, "but doing it on a regular basis can quickly lead to severe engine damage."

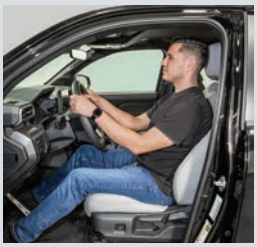
EXPERT TIP Some recent Toyotas use very thin 0W-8 oil, and many other newer cars call for 0W-20—products you might not be able to find at the gas station. If your car has a less available oil type and needs to be topped off occasionally, it's a good idea to carry a quart or two with you, just in case you need it.

HOW TO TOP IT OFF

Unscrew the oil fill cap—usually a plastic screw-on cap with "oil" printed on it, located on top of the engine—and use a funnel to add oil. "The 'add' dipstick mark on some engines shows that it's a half-quart low; in others, it's a full quart," Crossen says. "Start by adding half a quart, recheck the level, then add more oil if necessary. Repeat until the oil level is between the dipstick's 'full' and 'add' marks."

EXPERT TIP Never overfill the oil. Doing so can cause serious problems, including premature engine wear and leaks. "You don't have to fill the oil all the way. Just make sure it's between the marks on the dipstick," Crossen says.

ILLUSTRATION: KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS



MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

Toyota Tacoma

A Rough Ride and Loud Engine

62
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 59

HIGHS User-friendly controls, off-road ability

LOWS Stiff ride, clumsy handling, rough-sounding engine, high step-in for access, basic-looking cabin with an overabundance of plastic

POWERTRAIN 278-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on regular

PRICE $31,500-$63,900 base price + $1,495 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $46,787

BY MIKE MONTICELLO

THE ALL-NEW TACOMA sees a few improvements, including quicker acceleration, better fuel economy, and a less awkward driving position. But it remains a crude truck because of its stiff ride, clumsy handling, and coarse-sounding engine. As such, its road-test score is well below rivals like the Chevrolet Colorado, Honda Ridgeline, and Nissan Frontier.

AEB with pedestrian detection and highway-speed AEB are standard. The second-tier SR5 we purchased comes with BSW and RCTW, but they're optional on the SR trim.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Most Tacomas have a 278-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine. It packs strong midrange torque and gets the truck to 60 mph about a half-second quicker than the outgoing V6 model. But the engine sounds gritty and unrefined. A 326-hp hybrid–unique among midsized pickup trucks–is available, boasting stronger power and slightly improved fuel economy.

Unlike the Colorado and Ridgeline, which provide some responsiveness through corners, the Tacoma feels clumsy, and the steering delivers almost no feedback to the driver about tire grip. Toyota equips most versions of the new Tacoma with a coil-spring rear suspension in an attempt to achieve a smoother cruise, but this setup only marginally improves the ride quality. It's still choppy and uncomfortable.

Both the Tacoma's 6,500-pound tow rating and 1,200-pound payload capacity trail some rival pickups. At least its off-road ability remains impressive: The truck scaled the challenging Rock Hill at our test track with ease.

CABIN COMFORT

The most improved aspect of the new Tacoma may very well be the driving position. You no longer feel like you're sitting on the floor, thanks to a chair-like perch along with good headroom and knee space.

The front seats have ample side bolsters to hold you in place through turns, but bottom cushion support wanes on longer drives. The rear seat is tight even by midsized crew-cab standards, with limited legroom and an uncomfortably upright seatback, although headroom is generous.

Cabin quality is dismal, even for a pickup truck. There are yards of hard plastic and too many rough edges.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The rugged-looking interior benefits from large, glove-friendly buttons and knobs, and common functions are easy to operate. The instrument screen is confusing, though, because the driver assistance menu is full of puzzling acronyms.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

–Mike Monticello

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs

Lincoln Nautilus Hybrid

Fuel-Efficient and Luxurious, but Controls Are Confusing

79
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 81

HIGHS Impressive fuel economy, quiet cabin, roomy rear seat, finely crafted interior, excellent active driving assistance system

LOWS Handling lacks agility, confusing controls, awkward driving position

POWERTRAIN 310-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 30 mpg on regular

PRICE $53,790-$76,950 base price + $1,595 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $64,170

THE REDESIGNED NAUTILUS features an optional hybrid powertrain and boasts a flashy display screen that stretches across the entire front of the cabin. We appreciate its super-quiet, roomy, and well-finished interior, and the hybrid model's fuel efficiency. But the ride can get unsettled when driving on bumpy roads, the handling is mushy, and the controls are complicated.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

We chose the hybrid powertrain, which combines a turbocharged four-cylinder with electric drive to deliver 310 hp. It benefits from an initial shove of electric power off the line, and there's good overall thrust for merging onto a highway. The Nautilus does a decent job of minimizing the dreaded "rubber-band effect" that plagues many continuously variable transmissions, which is when the engine revs rise quite high if you're accelerating with any urgency. While it's a half-second quicker to 60 mph than the Lexus RX350h hybrid, it can't match its fuel efficiency: 34 mpg overall for the Lexus vs. a still outstanding 30 mpg for the Lincoln.

Initially, the ride comes across as comfortable and pampering as it soaks up large, single bumps nicely. But the SUV feels loose and jittery on rougher roads, and the body rocks from side to side too much. Handling agility also isn't a strong suit. The Nautilus feels rather ponderous through turns, and the steering is slow and light on driver feedback.

Stopping distances are adequate, but we found the brake pedal too sensitive at parking-lot speeds and too soft and spongy out on the road.

CABIN COMFORT

The interior is spacious, particularly the rear seat, with its cushy padding, tons of knee room, and lots of underleg support. Reactions on the driver's seat were mixed. Some said it was comfortable with decent lateral support; others found it squishy with an overly short bottom cushion. We all agreed that the oblong-shaped steering wheel feels truly odd during tight turns.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

At first glance, the cabin impresses. It oozes quality because of all the soft-touch areas, stitching, and chrome. The configurable display screen, which spans the entire width of the dash, gives the interior a very high-tech look.

But the push-button gear selector forces the driver to look down and to the right rather than operating it by feel, the dashboard air vents can only be adjusted by sliding a finger across the lower screen, and we dislike the guessing game caused by the unlabeled steering wheel buttons.

LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUVs

BMW X2

A Strong Performer With Low-Speed Hiccups

75
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

HIGHS Agile handling, short stopping distances, excellent fuel economy, comfortable front seats, high-quality cabin

LOWS Uneven power delivery, stiff ride, confusing controls, hampered rear visibility

POWERTRAIN 241-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 7-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 29 mpg on premium

PRICE $42,450-$51,850 base price + $1,175 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $46,295

THE REDESIGNED X2, which is essentially an X1 with a sleeker, more coupelike body, gets added power, better fuel efficiency, and (finally) standard BSW and RCTW. But the powertrain's inconsistent low-speed power delivery, a stiff ride, and confusing controls bring down the X2's road-test score.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Our tested xDrive28i's 241-hp, 2.0-liter turbo four-cylinder packs an energetic punch and sounds invigorating. The seven-speed dual-clutch automatic shifts smoothly and quickly at speed, and its efficient operation helps the X2 achieve an impressive 29 mpg overall. But due to some turbo lag and the action of the transmission's internal clutches, the little BMW suffers from a delay of power when you step on the gas pedal coming out of a rolling stop, followed by an abrupt burst of acceleration that makes it difficult to drive smoothly.

Although the X2 doesn't possess the handling balance that comes from a rear-drive-based platform found in most BMWs, it's still nimble and light on its feet, tackling corners easily with minimal body roll. The steering has a natural heft and delivers decent feedback to the driver about tire grip. But the ride is too firm: The suspension feels stiff and unyielding over potholes and other sharp bumps.

Braking performance is top-notch in terms of its short stopping distances, but the pedal can be too sensitive, especially at lower speeds.

CABIN COMFORT

Our drivers raved about the optional front sport seats, which have well-defined side bolsters and comfortable padding. Some drivers bemoaned the lack of adjustable lumbar support, though. There's less rear-seat space than in the more upright X1, with tight headroom and room for knees, though foot space is decent. Rear and side visibility are hampered by thick pillars and small windows, creating a cavelike interior. The X2's swoopy styling also results in an 8-cubic-foot drop in cargo room compared with the X1.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

Controls have taken a turn for the worse due to the reduction of physical knobs and buttons. Many tasks now involve going through the touchscreen, which often means extra steps. For example, most climate functions require pressing a specific icon at the bottom of the screen to bring up a separate menu. Other oddities include having to go through the screen to deactivate the annoying engine stop/start system rather than just pressing a button on the center console or the dashboard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **A Mixed Bag** The Lincoln Nautilus and BMW X2 perform well enough to be recommended, while the Tacoma still trails midsized pickup rivals in our road tests.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS																
✓ **Honda Ridgeline** 3.5L	78	$36,480	↕	↑	83	20	380	↑ / ↕	↑	↑	↑	↑	↕	7.3	134	S
Toyota Tacoma 2.4T	62	$46,787	↕	↕	59	20	365	↑ / ↓	↑	↕	↓	↕	↓	7.5	136	O
Chevrolet Colorado 2.7T	56	$41,070	↓	↕	71	19	410	↑ / ↓	↑	↕	↕	↕	↕	6.9	134	O
GMC Canyon 2.7T	56	$44,970	↓	↕	71	19	410	↑ / ↓	↑	↕	↕	↕	↕	6.9	134	O
Nissan Frontier 3.8L	48	$40,630	↓	↓	67	18	370	↕ / ↓	↑↑	↕	↓	↕	↕	7.5	128	O
Jeep Gladiator 3.6L	45	$46,405	↓	↕	52	18	400	↕ / ↕	↑	↓	↕	↕	↓	7.8	135	O
LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs																
✓ **BMW X5** 3.0T	92	$68,730	↑↑	↑↑	94	23	495	↑↑ / ↑	↕	↑↑	↑	↑↑	↑	6.0	129	S
✓ **Lexus RX450h+** 2.5T+E	89	$75,860	↑	↑	94	34	37[E] + 490	↑↑ / ↑↑	↓	↑	↑	↑↑	↕	6.4	135	S
✓ **BMW X5 PHEV** 3.0T+E	88	$82,945	↕	↑↑	98	21	39[E] + 375	↑↑ / ↑	↕	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑	4.4	126	S
✓ **Lexus RX350h** 2.5H	83	$59,955	↑	↑	86	34	585	↑ / ↑↑	↓	↑	↑	↑↑	↕	7.8	137	S
✓ **Lincoln Nautilus Hybrid** 2.0T+E	79	$64,170	↕	↕	81	30	605	↑ / ↑↑	↓	↑	↕	↑↑	↕	7.3	132	S
✓ **Lexus RX350** 2.4T	78	$55,595	↑	↑	79	24	420	↑ / ↑↑	↓	↑	↑	↑↑	↕	7.5	132	S
Mercedes-Benz GLE450 3.0T	61	$75,090	↓	↕	76	20	455	↑↑ / ↑↑	↓↓	↑↑	↑	↑↑	↕	6.0	132	S
Land Rover Range Rover Sport 3.0T	61	$92,170	↓	↑	81	20	480	↑↑ / ↑↑	↓	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑	7.2	133	S
Genesis GV80 3.5T	61	$65,775	↓	↑	75	18	375	↑↑ / ↑	↓↓	↑↑	↑	↑↑	↑	6.0	129	S
LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUVs																
✓ **BMW X1** 2.0T	79	$46,495	↕	↓↓	86	28	405	↑↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↕	↑↑	↑	7.1	124	S
✓ **Lexus UX250h** 2.0H	78	$37,740	↑↑	↓	75	37	395	↑ / ↓	↕	↑	↑	↑	↑	8.8	137	S
✓ **BMW X2** 2.0T	75	$46,295	↕	↕	80	29	415	↑↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↕	↑	↑	7.0	128	S
✓ **Audi Q3** 2.0T	70	$43,940	↕	↓	82	23	365	↑↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	7.8	126	S
Cadillac XT4 2.0T	64	$49,430	↕	↓	76	23	370	↑↑ / ↕	↑	↕	↕	↑	↑	7.6	128	S
Volvo XC40 2.0T	64	$41,510	↕	↕	70	24	335	↑↑ / ↑	↓↓	↑	↕	↑	↑	7.3	132	S
Buick Encore GX 1.3T	63	$33,145	↕	↓	68	26	340	↕ / ↕	↑	↕	↕	↑	↑	9.4	126	S
Alfa Romeo Tonale 1.3T+E	56	$47,790	↓	↑	71	29	32[E] + 320	↑ / ↕	↓	↕	↕	↕	↑	6.3	131	S
Mercedes-Benz GLA250 2.0T	52	$43,475	↓	↓↓	75	27	360	↑ / ↕	↓↓	↑	↕	↑	↑	6.8	133	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (—) means no such safety system is offered; O means it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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CR's NAUGHTY LIST

Every year, we test over 2,300 products–and a handful stand out for all the wrong reasons. Here are some of the ones that got the lowest Overall Scores (on a scale from 1 to 100) in their categories. CR's advice: If you're making your list and checking it twice, leave these products off it.

FEELING ITCHY?

Sawyer Picaridin Insect Repellent Lotion $10

In our tests this lotion provided less than 2 hours of protection against ticks and mosquitoes—and it can stain fabric.

4 OVERALL SCORE

20 OVERALL SCORE

SUBPAR SOUND

Polaroid P1 Wireless & Bluetooth Speaker $90

It may be cute and portable, but don't expect good music vibes. Our testers found the bass subdued, the midrange "telephone-like," and the treble harsh. The volume fades in and out, too.

25 OVERALL SCORE

REPAIR-PRONE

2024 Jeep Wrangler $31,995-$91,545

Shopping for an SUV? Keep looking unless you like spending time with your mechanic. The Wrangler has a very low predicted reliability score, 27—and the lowest Overall Score of any vehicle we've recently tested.

A CUT BELOW

Elite Platinum Gourmet Hover Chop EMC4423 $40

Food choppers can make quick work of a tedious job, but not the Elite Platinum: It did a poor job of both chopping and grating in our tests. Puréeing was just okay, and it's also fairly noisy.

28 OVERALL SCORE

SECURITY RISK

Delaney 345001 Door Lock $30

You can't rely on this lock to protect your home from a break-in: Our testers found it easy to pick and to kick or drill open.

12 OVERALL SCORE

UNCLEAN AIR

Dyson HP07 Hot+Cool Black & Nickel Air Purifier $750

15 OVERALL SCORE

This pricey air purifier has a sleek design, but our tests revealed it wasn't good at removing dust, smoke, and pollen. It's loud even when running on low (the setting you might use in a bedroom).

30 OVERALL SCORE

LAUNDRY LOSER

Insignia NS-TWM35W1 $450

If your goal is fresh, clean, stain-free clothes, skip this top-load agitator washer. This lowest-rated of all models got poor test scores for washing performance, and it's a bit noisy.

NOT-SO-SAFE SAW

Greenworks CS24L410 $190

Think twice before choosing this battery powered chainsaw: It not only has rock-bottom performance test scores but also lacks a chain brake to keep the operator safe in the event of kickback.

34 OVERALL SCORE

ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER

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